RESILIENCE AT WORK:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PROCESS OF RESILIENCE

WITH MARKETING AGENCY PROFESSIONALS

BY

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Abstract

Professionals who work in marketing communication agencies face the challenge of continuously producing creative work while facing nearly constant critique, feedback, and rejection from clients and colleagues. Frequent messages of criticism combined with fierce competition, demand for creativity, tight deadlines, and long work hours makes careers in this field stressful for the practitioner. Despite critique and rejection, these professionals must recover from setbacks and bring new work and new ideas to their clients on a routine basis. This study explored the process of resilience with marketing communication professionals who have encountered setbacks on the job using in-depth interviews (N=22). These interviews yielded in-depth accounts of the types of situations that serve as trigger or springboard events for individual resilience and the strategies and processes participants report they call upon to recover from setbacks.

Despite the fact that researchers now believe resilience is important for job success and at least in part something that can be developed, very little research has been dedicated to how individuals can develop their own capacities for resilience and how people, such as managers, could help develop the capacity in others. This research adds to the emerging body of literature on individual resilience in the workplace. Findings demonstrate there are general strategies used by professionals with experience to bounce back from setbacks at work.

This research makes theoretical contributions to the developing body of resilience literature by exploring the communicative tools and strategies used by those who report to be able to successfully tap into their own resilience and by providing qualitative evidence that resilience is a developable capacity. This research adds to the agency literature by exploring the

normative nature of client incivility and how it may contribute to the industry's high turnover and by offering a new application of the concept of client capture. This research also adds to the agency literature by presenting the voice of the account manager, which is notably absent in much of the recent agency literature.

This research also offers practical implications. In particular, this research offers specific strategies that can be enacted by individuals and modeled by managers to help them bounce back from adversity and develop the capacity for resilience.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

Professionals who work in marketing communication agencies face the challenge of continuously producing creative work while facing nearly constant critique, feedback, and rejection from clients and colleagues. Frequent messages of criticism combined with fierce competition, demand for creativity, tight deadlines, and long work hours makes careers in this field stressful for the practitioner (Career Cast, 2010; Crenshaw, 2013). However, despite critique and rejection, these professionals must bounce back and bring new work and new ideas to their clients on a routine basis. While the context of marketing communication firms is the subject of this study, professionals who work in client services and/or creative environments in other areas of the knowledge economy likely face similar situations.

Many of the factors that cause stress in marketing communication firms—such as tight deadlines and inter-agency conflict—have been explored in the advertising literature and the industry trade media and are deemed to be non-negotiable parts of the job (Langballe, Falkum, Innstrand, & Aasland, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2000). However, an important facet of the job of the client services account manager (AM)[1] that has been nearly ignored in the academic literature and industry trade media is the steady stream of negative feedback, criticism and sometimes outright rejection that AMs face in the course of conducting regular business and the corresponding individual resilience they must enact in order to continue to do their jobs. One reason for this gap, particularly in the trade media, may be that savvy marketing communication professionals would be hesitant to criticize clients who, effectively, pay their salaries. Based on the researcher's own professional experience and in-depth interviews with current practitioners, most conversations about the difficulty of working with clients take place behind closed doors with trusted colleagues, friends, and family members.

The negative feedback from clients and colleagues is one contributing factor to marketing communication's notoriously high turnover rate of approximately 30 percent (Ad Age, 2013; Stratz, 2012). To put that statistic into perspective, only the hospitality industry has a higher rate of turnover at 37 percent (Stratz, 2012). Writing on his advertising agency's blog (Gale, 2014), Rick Riley said of the link between client critiques and turnover:

> I think it may be because of the tremendous amount of death we experience. That is, for every campaign idea that actually comes to life, there are probably ten others that don't. And they can die all sorts of horrible deaths. It wears on you. (n.p.)

This is not to say that negative feedback does not have a productive role in the process of creating marketing communications. Negative performance feedback is widely accepted by organizational psychologists and human resource experts to be critical in the professional development of workers (Ilgen & Davis, 2000). However, as important as negative performance feedback is believed to be, it is also known to be unpleasant for both parties (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Manzoni, 2009). Further, negative performance feedback has a "tendency to elicit undesirable responses from receivers" (Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009, p. 160). These undesirable responses can include hostility toward the source, conflict, and relational damage that can last for years (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009). Some recipients of critical performance feedback may even lash out at the source or become physically violent toward the source or other colleagues (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Neuman & Baron, 1998). However, because of the nature of their work, those in client service roles do not truly have the option of outwardly expressing hostility or negative feelings toward a client who provides negative feedback or criticism. Instead, many must enact a form of resilience that allows them to carry on with their work.

Youssef and Luthans (2005) argued that resilience is what "allows people to keep trying and to restore their self-efficacy even after it has been challenged and predicted to decrease after a setback" (p. 5). Negative performance feedback from clients and colleagues can be considered such a setback. The study reported in this dissertation is an in-depth look at how resilience is activated by marketing communication professionals in the face of negative feedback and criticism from clients and colleagues.

Resilience is emerging in the communication literature, drawing from established theory and empirical findings in psychology (Buzzanell, 2010). The literature commonly describes the process of resilience as "bouncing back" (for examples see Buzzanell, 2010; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Moenkemeyer, Hoegl, & Weiss, 2012; Torres & Fyke, 2013). The use of this term conveys the familiar experience humans have with the phenomenon of resilience.

The communicative perspective on resilience differs from other positive scholarship on resilience in several important ways. First, the communicative perspective on resilience treats resilience as a developable capacity rather than as a trait that a person either possesses or does not possess. For example, Buzzanell argued that "rather than an individual phenomenon that someone either possesses or does not, resilience is developed, sustained, and grown through discourse, interaction, and material considerations" (2010, p. 1). Second, the communicative perspective emphasizes that resilience is an emergent process (Buzzanell, 2010; Torres & Fyke, 2013). This contrasts with views of resilience that treat resilience as an outcome. Poole argued that through a process perspective, "we can see resilience as dynamic, integrated, unfolding over time and through events, evolving patterns, and dependent on contingency" (as cited in Buzzanell, 2010, p. 2). Communication scholars also acknowledge the critical roles discourse, messages, and narratives play in the process of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010). The communicative perspective on resilience is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

While resilience is still not completely understood, it is believed to be an important capacity. As an interviewee in Coutu's (2002) research suggested: "More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom" (p. 3).

The following research explores the phenomenon of individual resilience through the eyes of marketing communication professionals with the lived experience of activating resilience in their work. In keeping with Buzzanell (2010), I have used Richardson's (2002) definition of resilience as "the process of reintegrating from disruptions in life" (p. 309). These disruptions are also referred to in the literature as trigger events (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). The frequent negative feedback on their work that AMs receive from clients and colleagues can be considered disruptions or trigger events. Therefore, the overarching question guiding this study was: How do marketing communication professionals activate resilience after receiving negative performance feedback from clients and colleagues?

My research complements existing research by adopting a communicative approach to the study of resilience and seeking to understand the process by which individuals activate and enact resilience in the face of negative performance feedback. This research has the opportunity to make theoretical and practical contributions. First, because the literature on resilience is emerging in the communication and organizational behavior literature, more research into the phenomenon is required so that scholars and practitioners can better understand resilience. Second, because the communication literature on resilience suggests that resilience is a developable capacity (Buzzanell, 2010), a better understanding of how resilience is activated will provide professionals with relatable examples of resilience that they could apply to their own working lives. Further, this research could provide direction for managers wishing to develop capacity for resilience among their team members and for individuals wishing to develop their own capacity for resilience. Finally, while the context of marketing communication firms is unique, this researcher believes the phenomenon of resilience in the face of criticism and other setbacks is recognizable to professionals who work in various facets of intellectual and creative services and therefore is applicable to their work.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 has outlined the need for research into the process of activating resilience in professional settings. The case for using a communicative perspective to study this topic and the ways that the study can add to the body of literature in communication studies was also addressed. The literature review in Chapter 2 further examines the resilience literature, specifically focusing on resilience as a developable capacity, everyday phenomenon, and an emergent process. Literature on performance feedback is addressed. The context for the study is also described in Chapter 2. The research questions guiding the study are presented at the end of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methods that were used to answer the research questions and provides a discussion about why these methods were best suited to this investigation. Chapter 4 presents the results related to each research question, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings and how they extend our current understanding of the topic and add to the literature, both theoretically and practically. Chapter 5 also includes the limitations present in the current study and provides suggestions for future research on this topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is divided into four sections. The chapter begins with a review of the literature on resilience. This review begins with a historic look at resilience and its origins in the psychology literature. Then the review moves to the literature on resilience from a communicative perspective with discussions of resilience as a process, resilience as different from other positive states, and resilience in the workplace. The third section presents a review of the literature of negative performance feedback in the workplace, acknowledging the important but difficult role negative performance feedback has. Finally, the research questions guiding the study are presented.

Resilience

Resilience is emerging in the communication literature, drawing from established theory and empirical findings in psychology (Buzzanell, 2010). Psychological resilience is defined in several ways. Some define psychological resilience as flexibility in response to changing situational demands and the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences (Luthans, 2002). Psychological resilience is also defined as "as the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity" or "as a measure of successful stress-coping ability" (Vaishnavi, Connor & Davidson, 2007, p. 293). The research presented in this dissertation adopts Richardson's (2002) definition of resilience as "the process of reintegrating from disruptions in life" (p. 309).

Research suggests that resilience is associated with improvements in mental and physical health (Vaishnavi et al., 2007) and contributes to protection against post-traumatic stress disorder in combat veterans (King, King, Fairbank, Keane, & Adams, 1998; Vaishnavi et al., 2007; Waysman, Schwarzwald, & Solomon, 2001). Resilience and the related concept of hardiness are thought to be an index of mental health (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994; Ramaniah, Sharpe, & Byravan, 1999), and resilience specifically "may be associated with improvements in both physical and mental health" (Vaishnavi et al., 2007, p. 293). Research suggests that "resilience may be related to neuropsychiatric disease prevention after exposure to environmental stressors" (Vaishnavi et al., 2007, p. 296).

Research into psychological resilience started in the 1960s with Norman Garmezy's studies on why some children with parents who are schizophrenic did not suffer psychological illness as a result of growing up with these parents (Bazelon, 2006). Garmezy concluded that resilience played a more important role in mental health than had previously been suspected (Coutu, 2002). For several decades, research on resilience remained focused on children. Resilience research later expanded to research with adults, mainly focusing on why some people are better able to positively adjust after traumatic experiences (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Moekenmeyer, Hoegel, & Weiss, 2012).

Since these early trials, research has provided increasing evidence that "the concept of resilience has biological validity" (Vaishnavi et al., 2007, p. 293). Charney's (2004) research showed resilience may be marked by high measures of dehydroepiandrosterone, neuropeptide Y, galanin, and testosterone, as well as increased 5-HT1A receptor and benzodiazepine receptor function. As summarized by Vaishnavi, Connor, and Davidson,

> there is also a possible genetic correlation to resilience: the T.7 haplotype of the DRD4 dopamine gene may be correlated with decreased resilience (Gervai et al., 2005) as is also believed to be the case for a polymorphism of the serotonin transporter gene (Caspi et al., 2003). (2007, p. 294)

Further, there is some evidence that a better understanding of resilience may be critical in the development of preventative treatments for a wide assortment of neuropsychiatric disorders (Vaishnavi et al., 2007). Research into the biological science behind resilience shows that resilience is, at least in part, a physical phenomenon. However, resilience is being studied as a social phenomenon as well. An interesting and unanswered question is the extent to which resilience is enacted based on people's individual experiences regardless of biological capacities for resilience. Whether resilience is at least in part socially constructed is discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation..

The Communicative Perspective

The following section reviews the literature on resilience from a communication perspective. It is divided into four sub-sections. In the first sub-section I review literature that discusses resilience as a developable capacity. Second, I present literature on resilience as an emergent process. Third, I review literature that presents resilience as a construct distinct from other positive states. Finally, I review the literature on resilience in the workplace.

Resilience as an Everyday, Developable Phenomenon

Early views of resilience stressed the role played by genetics in resilience. The argument was that "some people are just born resilient" (Coutu, 2002, p. 3). A critique of this early view of individuals being resilient or not is that this approach creates a "false dichotomy between 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' individuals" (Wilson & Arvanitakis, 2013, para. 9). While the literature acknowledges that genetics plays some role, more recent empirical evidence suggests resilience is a state rather than a trait and can be learned (Coutu, 2002). This change in thinking has led researchers to view resilience not as "an inherent characteristic, trait or set of behaviors of particularly 'resilient' individuals or groups" but as a "common and everyday capacity, expressed and expressible by all people" (Wilson & Arvanitakis, 2013, para. 1). Research conducted with varied populations, settings, and outcome variables has confirmed that "resilience is not a rare phenomenon" (Luthans et al., 2006, p. 27). The results of such studies caused researchers to "acknowledge the ordinariness or everydayness of resilience-related phenomenon" (Wilson & Arvanitakis, 2013, para. 7).

Understanding resilience as a state allows researchers to see resilience as "more malleable and open to change" than other positive traits that are hardwired into the individual (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 776). Despite the fact that researchers now believe resilience is at least in part something that can be developed, little academic research has been dedicated to "how people develop resiliency in themselves and others" (Luthans et al., 2006, p. 35).

Resilience as a Process

One way in which the communicative perspective on resilience differs from other positive scholarship is in its emphasis on resilience as an emergent process (Buzzanell, 2010; Torres & Fyke, 2013). The communicative take on resilience explores "the resilience processes as the focal point rather than examining the person or entity" (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 13). This contrasts with other views of resilience that treat resilience as an outcome or as an individual trait. The communicative view essentially represents "a design change, where the focus shifts from the individual or singular toward the communication processes that enable resilience" (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 13). The view of resilience as a process "acknowledges that resilience is contextual and interactive" (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 9). Through a process perspective, resilience is viewed as "dynamic, integrated, unfolding over time and through events, evolving into patterns, and dependent upon contingencies" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 2).

In her 2010 Presidential Address to the International Communication Association, Buzzanell built upon the view of resilience as a process and suggested five specific communicative processes "that enhance people's abilities to create new normalcies" (p. 9). The processes Buzzanell offered are: (a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communicative networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive ones. She said that while these processes are not new, that they "function as the basis for resilience is new" (2010, p. 3). Each of these processes is briefly described below.

Crafting normalcy is the process individuals and groups use to talk new normalcies into being in order to bounce back from a setback. For example, in their research with families who had experienced job loss (arguably a setback or disruption), Buzzanell and Turner (2003, cited in Buzzanell, 2010) found that individuals and families "implicitly and sometimes explicitly produced a system of meanings that enabled them to maintain the mundane, the regularities in life" despite the fact that as a result of job loss life had changed (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 3). In interviews, participants insisted their lives were normal despite the disruption to their routines due to job loss. Buzzanell argued that "new normalcies were literally created through talk and maintenance of family rituals" (2010, p. 4).

Buzzanell (2010) described identity anchors as "a relatively enduring cluster of identity discourse upon which individuals and their familial, collegial, and/or community members rely when explaining who they are for themselves and in relation to others" (p. 4). Similarly, Bouchikhi and Kimberly (2003) defined identity anchors as "core, enduring and distinctive" attributes that key stakeholders could identify (para. 3). In their job loss study, Buzzanell and Turner (2003, cited in Buzzanell, 2010) found evidence of the use of identity work by individuals and families as they worked to bounce back from job loss. For example, during interviews, men who had experienced job loss referred to their roles as fathers, breadwinners, and heads of households so that their “identities were anchored against uncertainties” (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 5).

Buzzanell’s (2010) third process for communicatively developing resilience—maintaining and using communication networks—is the process by which individuals and groups build social capital and cash in on it during difficult times. Buzzanell (2010) pointed to research conducted with small business owners who sought to reopen after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. Those business owners with a network of both strong and weak relational ties were better able to reintegrate and survive after Hurricane Katrina. Those businesses with few ties and limited networks were more likely to struggle (Doerfel, Lai, Kolling, Keeler, & Barbu, 2008).

Putting alternative logics to work after a trigger event creates resilience through reframing (Buzzanell, 2010; Torres & Fyke, 2013). To reframe a situation is to change the way a person or group views a situation or opportunity. In the case of a setback, reframing allows individuals and groups to “create their own logics that enable them to reintegrate when facing adverse experience” (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 14). For example, a manager who is attempting to motivate employees who believe they have too much work and not enough people to complete it may frame the situation as “a good problem to have in this economy” rather than focusing on the long hours the team will have to put in to complete the work. Another example is that of an individual who talks about an obstacle as an opportunity rather than a challenge. In this way, individuals and groups use their talk to “endure unfavorable situations” and communicatively create “conditions that enable adaptation” (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 14).

The fifth process used to develop resilience, according to Buzzanell (2010), is legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. Buzzanell argued that backgrounding is not repression or denial. Rather it is acknowledging "that one has the legitimate right to feel anger or loss in certain ways but that these feelings are counterproductive to more important goals" (2010, p. 9). That is, through this process, individuals and groups acknowledge negative feelings that come as a result of a setback are real but focus on positive action that allows them to adapt and survive. "As a communicative construction, this process includes reframing of a situation both linguistically and metaphorically" (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 13).

The five processes Buzzanell (2010) argued are used to create resiliency—(a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communicative networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive ones—provided a solid launching point for my research with marketing communication professionals reported in this dissertation. I describe the use of these processes in my strategy for data analysis in Chapter 3.

Resilience as Different from Hope and Optimism

The positive organizational scholarship literature has associated resilience with other positive states such as hope and optimism. As previously stated, psychological resilience is defined as flexibility in response to changing situational demands and the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences (Luthans, 2002). In contrast, a commonly accepted definition of hope in the positive organizational psychology literature is "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy); and, pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder, Irving, & Andersen, 1991, p. 287). Optimism has been defined as a generalized expectancy that one will experience good outcomes in life, which will lead to goal-striving (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Scholars such as Coutu (2002), Luthans, Vogelgesang, and Lester (2006), and Youssef and Luthans (2007) have noted two key differences between resilience and hope and optimism: the role of planning and the role of the trigger event.

Hope and optimism are most applicable when a situation can be approached with a plan (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Resilience, on the other hand, recognizes the needs for adaptation, flexibility, and "proactive and reactive measures in the face of adversity" (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 779). The capacity for resilience entails actively searching for and finding meaning even though the circumstances do not lend themselves to preparation, planning, or even logical interpretation (Coutu, 2002). In this way, resilience acknowledges the destructiveness that a trigger event, such as a setback or trauma, can have on even the most hopeful or optimistic individual. The trigger event causes the need to bounce back. The trigger event is also described as a springboard for resilience (Bonanno, 2004; Luthans et al., 2006; Reivich & Shatte, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2003; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998; Youssef & Luthans, 2005). The important role of the trigger event is the second way resilience is different from hope and optimism (Bonanno, 2004; Luthans et al., 2006). "The capacity for resilience promotes the recognition and acknowledgement of such impact, allowing the affected individual the time, energy, and resource investment to recover, rebound, and return to an equilibrium point" (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 779).

Resilience in the Workplace

Resilience in the workplace is still a relatively unexplored phenomenon. Resilience was introduced to the context of organizational research during the last decade (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). There are two main streams of research on resilience in the workplace: organizational resilience and individual resilience. The first stream is research on resilient organizations. Research in this area seeks to understand the role of resilience in why some organizations thrive while others fail. Because the research in this study focuses on individual resilience, rather than organizational resilience or group/team resilience, the following section reviews the research on how individuals' positive states, including resilience, can lead to positive outcomes at work.

Youssef and Luthans (2007) explored how the positive states of optimism, hope, and resilience relate to individual outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, work happiness, and commitment. Moore, Grunberg, and Greenberg (2004) examined the influence of experience with layoffs on resilience. In this study, Moore and colleagues found that individuals who reported to have contact with layoffs (either by being laid off or by witnessing colleagues being laid off) reported lower levels of job security and higher levels of intentions to quit, role ambiguity, depression, and other health problems. Based on this research, Moore argued that frequent contact with layoffs led to reduced resilience after setbacks.

Other research on resilience in the workplace has shown that individual resilience is measurable. Block and Kremen (1996) developed the first resilience scale. This scale included 14 Likert-type items such as "I enjoy dealing with new and unusual situations" and "I quickly get over and recover from being startled" (p. 352). Connor and Davidson (2003) created a new scale to measure resilience. Theirs is a 25-item scale that includes Likert-type items such as "Can deal with whatever comes," "Make unpopular or difficult decisions," and "Can handle unpleasant feelings" (p. 78). Higher scores arguably reflect more resilience. This scale has been widely used in the health, psychology, personality, and stress literature (for examples, see Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006; Connor, 2006; Davidson et al., 2005; and Sexton, Byrd, & von Kluge, 2010).

Moenkemeyer, Hoegl, and Weiss (2012) studied the construct of resilience in the aftermath of the termination of an innovation project. They developed the second-order construct Innovator Resilience Potential (IRP) construct, which is comprised of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, optimism, hope, self-esteem, and risk propensity. Their case study consisted of in-depth interviews with an innovation team whose project was terminated to determine project members' individual potential for innovative functioning after a project failure. The authors determined that, for these team members, all six IRP components were affected by the innovation project's termination and that project termination had consequences for future innovative behavior and coping.

Existing literature has shown that resilience exists in the workplace, is tied to positive workplace outcomes, and is measureable. However, there are two noticeable gaps on resilience research in the work context. First, much of the literature on resilience in the workplace treats resilience as a trait or resource rather than as a state and developable capacity (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). This static view of resilience ignores the process of resilience and focuses on the outcomes of resilience rather than on the antecedents of resilience. Second, there is a lack of emphasis on how the negative event or setback influences or activates resilience. Moenkemeyer, Hoegl, and Weiss (2012) argued that, instead, prior research treats "resilience as a factor that influences a setback's impact on individuals (Richardson, 2002), thereby neglecting this setback's potential influence on resilience" (p. 631). The recovery—or activation of resilience—after a setback can strengthen an individual's potential for coping positively with future setbacks. Evidence for this can be found in the post-traumatic growth and thriving literature. For example, this literature discusses situations in which an individual functions at a higher level than before after a setback, which suggests that people are able to learn how to deal with adverse events and setback and develop tools and mechanisms to cope in the future (Carver, 1998; Corbett, Neck & DeTienne, 2007; Dougall, Herberman, Delahanty, Inslicht, & Baum, 2000; Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). In the context of the present study, a marketing communication professional's activation of resilience in the face of negative feedback may be associated with how well the professionals is able to cope—that is, to be resilient—in the face of negative feedback in the future.

Negative Performance Feedback in the Workplace

The present research argues that negative performance feedback is one situation in which resilience may be activated and engendered. Therefore, the following section will review the salient literature on negative performance feedback in the workplace from people in power. Feedback is conceptualized as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Temperly, 2007, p. 81). Similarly, performance feedback has been defined as "communication containing information received from another person that is usually intended to inform recipients about their past job performance and/or to assist them in their future performance" (Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009, p. 159).

Feedback is believed to be a complex, multi-dimensional construct (Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Geddes (1993) found that feedback receivers evaluated feedback on two dimensions: message valence (positive or negative) and sensitivity (threatening versus non-threatening and respectful versus disrespectful). Research suggests that negative performance feedback (feedback with a negative valence) has four dimensions: explicit versus ambiguous, destructive versus constructive, low versus high knowledge of conditions of performance, and mixed/inconsistent versus clear standards of evaluation (Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009).

Performance feedback is recognized as an important source for learning and improving motivation and performance (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Herold, Liden, & Leatherwood, 1987; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). Employees use feedback to compare their performance with that of co-workers, assess interpersonal relationships, and make career choices (Cleveland, Lim, & Murphy, 2007; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Without performance feedback from others, people have a difficult time understanding how to correct or improve performance (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). Performance feedback may be particularly useful in creative work environments, such as marketing communication agencies, because "feedback reduces some of the uncertainty associated with the changing nature of work and because it helps performers to set new creative standards" (de Stobbelier, Ashford, & Buyens, 2011, p. 812).

As important as performance feedback is acknowledged to be, giving and receiving negative performance feedback is recognized as difficult for everyone involved (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Manzoni, 2009). Cannon and Witherspoon (2005) summarized negative feedback this way: "Delivering critical feedback can be brutal for everyone involved. Most managers hate giving critical feedback and most employees detest receiving it" (p. 120). Similarly, Cleveland, Lim, and Murphy (2007) argued that "the only task more difficult than *receiving* performance feedback is *giving* performance feedback" (p. 170, italics in the original).

Delivering and receiving negative feedback is difficult for several reasons. First, the process can be personal and highly emotional for both parties (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). It is widely accepted that people do not like to receive negative feedback, and their reactions can be unpredictable. For receivers, negative feedback can be a threat to ego and/or identity (Chory &

Kingsley Westerman, 2009; Geddes & Baron, 1997). As a result, negative feedback can elicit responses such as defensiveness, denial, negative affect, anger, conflict, and other anti-social responses (Chory & Kingsley Westerman, 2009; Ilgen et al., 1997; Tracy & Eisenberg, 1990/1991). Specifically, negative feedback recipients in work settings may "become angry, cry, storm out of the office" and even "lash out verbally" and "physically attack" the feedback giver (Cannon &Witherspoon, 2005, p. 122). In some very rare cases, individuals who have received negative performance feedback from a manager have shot the manager or colleagues (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Neuman & Baron, 1998).

The literature suggests that "managers often see little practical value in providing feedback because they anticipate a largely aversive situation, especially when constructive or negative feedback is offered" (Cleveland et al., 2007, p. 170). Perhaps fearing a negative response from the receiver or general conflict, a feedback giver may "inadvertently sabotage(s) the meeting by preparing for it in a way that stifles honest discussion. This is an unintentional—indeed, unconscious—habit that's a byproduct of stress and that makes it difficult to deliver corrective feedback effectively" (Manzoni, 2009, p. 114). Feedback givers may also let emotions negatively influence the quality of the feedback they deliver (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). For example, a manager may be overcome with emotion and lash out at a subordinate. This type of feedback is unlikely to generate a constructive response (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

In addition to the emotional element involved in giving and receiving feedback, many managers are not good at delivering feedback for several reasons (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Manzoni, 2009). First, research shows that most people tend to overestimate the effect of a person's internal characteristics rather than considering external or situational factors to explain someone else's behavior in a given situation (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005; Ilgen & Davis, 2000; Manzoni, 2009). This is referred to as the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). In work environments managers may have limited time, attention, and energy to dedicate to evaluating and discussing job performance. As a result, they may settle on the first acceptable explanation for an individual's performance rather than engaging in a thorough analysis of all possible explanations (Manzoni, 2009).

Additionally, many managers are not adequately trained to deliver feedback (Harms & Roebuck, 2010). Harms and Roebuck (2010) cite research conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) that found that managers were "insufficiently trained in giving feedback and did not provide quality coaching to their employees on how to perform at a higher level" (p. 414).

In sum, while performance is widely viewed as important for development and improvement, it is also commonly accepted that negative performance feedback is unpleasant for both giver and receiver. Negative feedback can serve as a threat to ego and/or identity to the receiver. Negative feedback can also provoke a negative, unpredictable, and volatile response from the receiver. Therefore, I argue that negative performance feedback can serve as a trigger or springboard event for the activation of resilience. Acknowledging the frequent nature of negative feedback messages received by Account Managers in marketing communication firms, this research investigated when and how these messages serve as trigger events or springboards for resilience.

Research Questions

The objective of my research is to understand how people experience resilience when they received negative performance feedback from clients and colleagues. Therefore, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: What are participants' accounts of situations at marketing communication agencies that require resilience?

RQ2: What are some of the communicative processes people call upon to activate resilience when faced with springboard or trigger events at work?

RQ3: How does successful recovery from a trigger event change how people report they enact resilience when faced with subsequent springboard or trigger events?

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study is to better understand the process of individual resilience in the workplace by exploring how client-facing employees of marketing communication firms experience resilience after they experience setbacks on the job. This chapter makes an argument for using qualitative inquiry to address the research questions related to how marketing communication professionals activate resilience in their work. This chapter is divided into several sections. The first section provides the context for the study with an in-depth look at the role of the account manager in marketing communication agencies. The second section makes the case for the use of qualitative methods to answer the research questions. The final section provides a detailed account of the methods used for data collection and analysis. The interview protocol, recruitment emails, and informed consent documents are included in the Appendix.

Context: Marketing Communications Agencies

Nearly half a million people in the United States work for marketing communication agencies that specialize in advertising, public relations, digital marketing, direct marketing, or media planning and buying (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a). The total industry is valued at more than $48 billion. While agencies vary in size, most are organized by department and include the following: Account Management or Client Service, Creative, Media Buying, and Account Planning (Advertising Education Foundation, 2014). Some agencies have additional departments such as Interactive/Digital, Production, and Graphic Design (Advertising Education Foundation, 2014). The current study will focus on those professionals who work in Account Management/Client Service. Typical job titles of those client-facing professionals in non-management positions in marketing communication agencies include account coordinator, assistant account executive/manager, account executive/manager, and specialist. Typical job titles of those in management positions in agencies include account supervisor, account director, management supervisor, and account group director. These titles were sourced by reviewing the web sites of a cross-section of advertising and public relations agencies across the United States. Regardless of specific corporate job title, those who work in the Account Management department are typically referred to within agencies as Account Managers (AM). The term Account Manager or AM will be used throughout this dissertation to refer to professionals who work in the Client Services, Account Management, or Account Service department of marketing communication agencies regardless of the specific title of the individual.

Non-practitioners may be most familiar with the work of the creative department because it is more frequently portrayed in popular culture—in shows such as “Mad Men” for example—than the other departments. The creative department is essentially responsible for developing the materials that deliver marketing messages (Vanden Bergh, Smith, & Wicks, 1986). That is, the creative department or the “creatives” are responsible for developing advertisements that appear in broadcast, print, and online media, in addition to other possible non-traditional forms of advertising such as product placement and guerilla marketing.

The account management or account services department “attempts to balance and represent the interests of both clients and their own agencies, advise on strategy with clients, and manage and oversee” the work of other agency departments “in terms of client suitability, goals, and deadlines” (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986, p. 55). The role of the AM is to be the client’s representative at the agency and the agency’s representative at the client’s organization (Advertising Education Foundation, 2014). These professionals “ must know something about a lot of the things that go on in an agency” (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986, p. 55) but they are not trained in the specialty areas such as copy writing, art direction, or media buying.

It is the AM's job to get the best possible work from the agency for the client but at a profitable return for the agency. This means knowing how to handle people at the agency so they give the client their best effort without spending more time than the income from the client's business justifies. In 1969, Doyle said the work of the AM is to inform, direct, cajole, encourage, understand, sympathize, and respect the specialists in the creative area. The responsibilities still hold true. However, the modern AM must also have a detailed knowledge of the client's business, the consumer, the marketplace, as well all aspects of marketing communication, such as creative production, media relations, research, and event planning. As team leader and strategist, the AM must communicate the client's needs clearly to the agency team, plan effectively to maximize staff time and energy, and present the agency's recommendations candidly to the client.

Specific tasks of the AM include selling agency services to the client, developing creative briefs, coordinating work, setting budgets and schedules, preparing ancillary work for the client (for example, Powerpoint presentations), ensuring projects run smoothly, and generally managing the business relationship between the agency and client (Franke et al., 2003; Grabher, 2002). Further, successful AMs must be able to foster productive communication between the client and agency, identify common goals, and make sure that the final product is profitable and effective for the client and the agency (Advertising Education Foundation, 2014). It is widely accepted by practitioners and theorists that the AM is the primary link between the agency and the client (Franke et al., 2003; Gralpois, 2010; Sutherland, Duke, & Abernethy, 2004).

While the professional life of the AM can be exciting, it is also filled with stressors such as tight deadlines, demanding clients, and conflict between departments within the agency (Crenshaw, 2013). In its annual studies of "America's Most Stressful Jobs," Career Cast has consistently ranked public relations officer/executive and advertising account executive in their list, alongside jobs such as police officer, firefighter, surgeon, and enlisted military personnel. Career Cast's survey evaluates 200 different jobs based on 11 "stressors" including deadlines, competitiveness, and physical hazards encountered on the job. Those jobs with the highest scores are deemed the most stressful (Kensing, 2014). This study has been published widely in news outlets such as *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and CNBC.

While some participants in the comments sections of news outlets that published the studies bristled at the suggestion that the jobs of advertising or public relations practitioners could be as stressful as life-threatening jobs such as police officer and military personnel, Career Cast explained the inclusion of advertising account executive as the #9 most stressful job in its 2010 study this way:

> Although not physically demanding, work in advertising is emotionally and mentally stressful. Competition and the pressure of acquiring and maintaining major accounts forces executives in this field to work long and irregular hours. The work requires a high level of creativity, meeting deadlines, close attention to detail and self-motivation. (n.p.)

Similarly, Career Cast described the public relations industry as "a highly competitive field" in which "specialists must work quickly and creatively to meet deadlines." Further, Career Cast suggested that public relations executives "need to be able to think and act quickly under stress" (Kensing, 2013, n.p.). This study also noted that public relations is "one of the professions attracting the most college students, which makes landing and keeping a good job that much more difficult" (2013, n.p.).

The job can be made even more stressful because maintaining the relationship with the client falls on the account management team. The perceived quality of the working relationship between the client and agency is a major factor in retaining or losing an account (Franke et al., 2003). The AMs "are the ones who field the calls, make the visits, do the lunches, orchestrate the meetings, deliver the follow-up, take the heat, build the trust" (Solomon, 2000, p. 4). As the legendary advertising practitioner David Ogilvy wrote of the account manager, "When the agency goofs, the client holds *him* responsible. When the client is bloody-minded, the agency blames *him*" (1983, p. 45).

Within the industry, the cut-throat culture is acknowledged. Writing on his agency's blog, Al Crawford, president of the advertising agency Clemenger BBDO, described the "Lord of the Flies environment" that agencies tend to breed as due to "Lots of Type A personalities with big egos and low self-esteem" and that this combination of personalities "makes for an industry atmosphere often more akin to American politics than a trade union" (Crawford, 2014, n.p., cited in Mumbrella, 2015).

In addition to working in competitive environments, those who work for marketing communication agencies can expect to put in long work days. Writing for Ad Age, an industry trade publication, 20-year agency veteran Paul Gumbinner said those who work in agencies typically work 60-80 hours per week (2010). Interviews with current practitioners conducted for this research revealed that these practitioners frequently work more than 50 or 60 hours per week. These estimates of the industry work weeks are significantly higher than the national average of 33 hours per week by full-time workers across industries (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

The marketing communication industry represents a wide range of salaries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014b), the average salary is $65,000. The average non-supervisory account manager earns $39,000 a year, while those in management earn an average of $146,410 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014b).

The Case for Qualitative Methods

As Silverman (2010) advised, "research methods should be chosen based on the specific task at hand" (p. 9). This research employed a comprehensive qualitative research strategy that was well suited to answer the research questions related to how resilience is activated by marketing communications professionals in the face of negative feedback from clients and colleagues.

The following section begins with a brief review of the purposes of qualitative research. Next, this section provides two arguments as to why qualitative methods were best suited to answer the research questions posed in this project. The section first makes a case for this study on resilience in the workplace as exploratory, and, thus well suited for qualitative inquiry. Next, this section discusses the importance of understanding the phenomenon of resilience through the eyes of those with the lived experience, which also makes it well suited to a qualitative approach.

Strengths of a Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that analyzes information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research focuses on exploring "in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples that are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve 'depth' rather than 'breadth'" (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1996, p. 61). This type of inquiry is used to capture expressive information about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors that cannot be conveyed through quantitative data (Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

The process of qualitative research involves emerging questions, collecting data in the participants' settings, and analyzing data inductively from particulars to general themes (Creswell, 2014). Because of close researcher involvement, the researcher gains an insider's view of the field. This allows the researcher "to find issues that are often missed (such as subtleties and complexities) by the scientific, more positivistic enquiries" (Hughes, 2006, p. 6).

As Creswell (2014) said, "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 246). Resilience, I argue, is one such human problem. Research on the phenomenon of resilience is still emerging, particularly in organizational settings. Scholars such as Buzzanell (2010) and Torres and Fyke (2013) have called for more research on this phenomenon. Morse (1991) suggested that a qualitative approach is needed when a topic is new or has been researched with a specific group of people. This is a strong argument in favor of using qualitative methods for studying how resilience is activated by marketing communication professionals when they encounter negative feedback.

Qualitative research has a direct concern for experiences as they are lived, felt, or undergone (Hughes, 2006; Sherman & Webb, 1998). The aim of this type of research is to understand experiences as participants have lived or felt them (Hughes, 2006). Because the study seeks to explore and understand how, when, and why resilience is activated by marketing communication professionals, qualitative methods are well suited for this study.

Qualitative methods do carry with them their own limitations, of course. The interview data I collected was self-reported with the potential of the influence of social desirability bias.

Interview participants may present themselves in a certain manner when speaking to a person they know to be a researcher with marketing experience. However, the benefit of hearing directly from AMs about triggers and responses creates an opportunity to identify factors not present in the literature and examine the phenomenon from the inside out.

A Final Thought about the Method

While quantitative techniques could be used to research resilience in the workplace, these strategies did not fit the research. For example, several scales, such as the Ego-Resilience Scale (Block & Kremen, 1986), could be used to measure resilience. The Ego-Resilience Scale is a 14-item survey with Likert-style items such as “I quickly recover after being startled” and “I like to take different paths to familiar places.” Youssef and Luthans (2007) used survey data to understand how the positive states of optimism, hope, and resilience related to individual outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, work happiness, and commitment. However, the purpose of this project was not to determine if marketing communication professionals are more resilient than others. The purpose was to understand how, when and why resilience is activated by this population in the course of their work. Therefore, qualitative inquiry was the best strategy to gain this knowledge.

Interviews

Qualitative researchers want participants to speak for themselves and to provide their perspectives in words and other actions (Hughes, 2006). In this way, qualitative researchers privilege the voice of the participants. This philosophical stance on inquiry was in keeping with my own as a researcher and was also in keeping with the nature of the research questions posed in this study.

Qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are one way to reach the goal of having participants teach the researcher. Babbie (2010) describes qualitative interviews as a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the interviewer can establish a direction for the conversation and pursue additional topics raised by the interviewee. Interviews are particularly well suited to "understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 173).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 marketing communication professionals who work in the account management department of eleven different public relations or advertising agencies. Participants represented all levels of account managers (including management supervisors, account supervisors, account executives, assistant account executives, and account coordinators). The main requirement for inclusion was that the individuals have extensive client contact and manage a number of relationships with clients and within their respective agencies.

I engaged in purposeful sampling in order to make informed judgments about who to interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In order to engage in purposeful sampling, I recruited individuals to interview who had work experiences related to my research questions on resilience in the face of criticism and rejection at work (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Participants represented a variety of job titles, agencies, and years of experience in the industry in order to gather an array of perspectives so that I could understand how resilience operates across situations.

The first participants were recruited through my professional network. I used purposeful snowball sampling to recruit additional interview participants. At the end of some interviews, I asked the participant if he or she knew of any other account managers who may be willing to speak to me. I then contacted those individuals to attempt to schedule an interview. This process continued until I reached saturation. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that saturation is reached when the concepts that are emerging from the data are well defined and explained. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) instruct that sampling should continue until interviews no longer produce new data. Once I reached the point at which I believed my interviews were no longer yielding new information, I stopped scheduling interviews.

Interviews allow for rapport to be developed between the interviewer and the interviewee, which is not possible in a survey method (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). Rapport development was important to my study because I asked questions that provoked participants to provide personal information regarding negative situations at work. This required a level of trust between interviewer and interviewee. All semi-structured interviews were based on a pre-planned interview protocol that served as a guide rather than a constraint (see Appendix A). The protocol was made up of carefully crafted questions designed to gather data relevant to the research questions. However, semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in the interview, as I was able to probe certain topics and ask follow up questions (Frey et al., 1992) to obtain more in-depth information about the process of resilience at work.

Reflexivity of the Researcher

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that "the experiences of whoever is engaged in an inquiry are vital to the inquiry and its implicated thought processes" (p. 4). In this way they called attention to the reflexive role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry. I recognized that my past experience as a marketing communications practitioner influenced the research process. I spent 12 years working in the account management departments of three advertising and public relations agencies and in the marketing departments of two large corporations. In my roles in corporate marketing I directed the agencies and provided feedback to them on their work. I have maintained close professional and personal relationships with my former colleagues. I clearly have personal connections to this industry. Through my own professional career as a marketing communications practitioner, I developed my own observations related to relationships with colleagues and clients, performance feedback, and resilience at work. The process of memoing helped me make sense of my own experiences and separate them from those of my participants.

Participants

Participants of this study included 22 professionals who were working in marketing communication agencies at the time of the interviews. I engaged in purposeful sampling, as I made informed judgments about whom to interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I recruited individuals to interview who had experiences that were vital to my research questions about resilience in the face of setbacks at work (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Interview participants had an average of 11 years of experience in the marketing industry (range 2-25 years). Six of the 22 participants had also worked in corporate marketing. Job titles ranged from assistant account executive to managing partner. In the discussion of results I include corporate titles for the participants in order to provide context. However, generally I refer these professionals' functional role of account manager throughout this dissertation.

All participants held client-facing roles. Every interview participant reported interacting with clients on a daily basis, with the majority reported interacting with clients multiple times throughout the day.

At the time of the interview, participants had been at their current job for an average of 5.8 years (range 1-15 years). This average is likely higher than the average tenure of most account managers at marketing communication firms. While statistics on the average job tenure for professionals in account management are not available, anecdotal evidence suggests it is lower than the national average of 4.2 years for salaried professional service workers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014b). The average length of time at the current job was driven up because of the number of interview participants who had been with their agency for more than 8 years. During interviews, participants discussed the factors that allowed them to stay in agency work despite seeing so many of their former colleagues move to corporate marketing jobs, which are perceived to be more lucrative and require fewer hours. Generally, the participants with long careers in agencies reported they continued to work for an agency because they liked the creative environment, variety of work, and new challenges provided in an agency setting.

Participants worked in agencies of various sizes in markets such as Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha, New York, and Washington, D.C. Two of the participants had international experience working in advertising agencies in London and Prague. Participants reported that their clients were located throughout the United States. Participants' clients, in most cases, were not located in the same market as the agency, which meant communication by phone and email was more common than face-to-face communication. However, agency personnel traveled to the client sites and vice versa in order to have in-person meetings. The frequency of face-to-face communication with clients varied widely from almost daily to quarterly.

The majority of participants worked for mid-sized agencies of approximately 50 people. Two participants worked for large global marketing agencies that were part of even larger advertising holding companies. One participant was a sole proprietor who went into business for himself after spending 18 years in small- or mid-sized agencies.

At the time of the interviews, participants worked with an average of 5.3 client organizations (range 1-20) and had an average of 18 client contacts (range 5-75). Because agencies and clients organized their businesses differently, I counted the number of client organizations the way the agency and participant counted the client. For example, if a participant worked with the two different divisions of the ACME company and considered them to be two different client organizations, I noted them as such. The number of client contacts was similarly determined by how the participant viewed the number of active client contacts he or she had. Some account managers dealt almost exclusively with a communications, advertising, or public relations manager, meaning they had fewer individual client contacts. Some account managers worked directly with product or brand managers, subject matter experts, and other executives within the client organization, meaning they might have dozens of individual client contacts at one organization. Those who worked in higher levels of account management typically had more possible client contacts than those who were more junior.

To ensure confidentiality, participants' names are replaced with pseudonyms in this document (see Table 1). Participants' functional job titles, as noted in Table 1, are used throughout the manuscript to give the reader some context. However, the general term Account Manager (AM) is used to refer to a professional working in the Account Management, Client Services, or Account Services department of a marketing communication agency, regardless of corporate title.

Procedures

Interview participants were first recruited through my own personal and professional network. I then used purposeful snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. I reached out to my professional contacts through email using the email communication approved by the

Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). When recruiting using snowball sampling, I provided the IRB-approved email to my contact to forward to the prospective interviewee. In all cases, email was used to set up the date, time, and location of the interviews.

Table 1

List of Participants

Pseudonym	Job Title	Years at Current Job	Years in the Industry
Angeline	Vice President	9.5	11.0
Sherry	Account Director	6.0	10.0
Heather	Account Director	10.0	12.0
Chelsea	Account Director	8.0	8.0
Anna	Vice President	15.0	18.0
Michelle	Account Director	1.5	15.0
Phillip	Partner	8.0	14.0
Will	Partner	2.0	14.0
Kelly	Sr. Account Manager	0.5	10.0
Jane	Account Manager	2.0	2.0
Finley	Account Director	3.5	7.0
Henry	Owner	7.0	25.0
Rena	Vice President	9.5	15.0
Frances	Vice President	14.0	14.0
Lori	Account Director	7.0	11.0
Rachel	Supervisor	0.5	9.0
Kate	Assist Account Exec	1.0	2.0
Julia	Sr. Vice President	8.0	18.0
Kathy	Sr. Account Exec	3.5	4.0
Diane	Sr. Account Exec	3.5	5.0
Helen	Account Director	4.0	14.0
Alice	Account Supervisor	4.0	10.0

When participants arrived at the interview location, I greeted each person and reviewed the informed consent form, as required by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). I then provided an overview of the interview process and confirmed that participants agreed to being audio recorded. Each participant signed the Informed Consent Form approved by the Institutional Review board before we began the interview. For those interviews that took place over the phone, I sent the Informed Consent form to the participant via email in advance of the interview. The participants printed, signed, and returned the approved Informed Consent form to me prior to the interview. Although I followed the interview protocol that was approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B), during the interviews I adapted the questions as needed and asked follow-up questions to probe for additional information.

Data Collection

All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device and were professionally transcribed by a paid transcription service. The audio files did not include any information that could be used to identify participants. The audio files included 981 minutes of audio (16 hours and 35 minutes) and yielded 426 pages of single-spaced text. I checked all transcripts for accuracy and made changes to the transcripts as needed to more accurately reflect the audio files.

This qualitative research was an iterative process in which data collection and analysis took place concurrently. Therefore, during the data collection process I engaged in frequent memoing about the interviews and participant observations throughout the entire analytic process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe memos as written records of analysis and note that writing memos forces the analyst to think about the data. Memoing helped me capture emerging ideas and make sense of concepts and connections between interviews. This allowed me to explore ideas with subsequent interview participants. For example, in one memo I explored the notion that participants seemed to expect clients to treat them in an uncivil manner. In my memo I noted that even new professionals were not necessarily shocked when they were yelled at by a client, even if the yelling upset them or hurt their feelings. This memo provided the spark for me to explore the normative nature of a lack of civility between client and agency. I was able to explore this concept in subsequent interviews and member checks.

The process of memoing was particularly important for me because of my close ties to the industry I studied. Memoing became a powerful tool for me to reflect upon and separate my own experiences from those of my interview participants.

Coding

I used the two-step process of open and axial coding during my analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe open coding as "a brainstorming approach to analysis" (p. 160). The goal of open coding is to "open up the inquiry" (Strauss, 1987, p. 29). During this stage I went through transcripts line by line and categorized "chunks of data" based on their meanings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 250). This unrestricted coding of data led to the creation of a codebook where codes and procedures for applying them were organized (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I used a thematic analysis to analyze the interview transcripts. Consistent with Owen's method (1984), I looked for reoccurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence is the repetition of a similar idea, perhaps with different wording, and repetition occurs when two participants use the same key words. Forcefulness was identified by vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses. With each research question in mind, I read and reread the transcripts, noting times when recurrence, repetition, or forcefulness indicated the potential for a key idea or theme to develop.

Because "resilient people do not often describe themselves that way" (Coutu, 2002, p. 8), I did not necessarily look for cases in which a participant used the terms resilient, resilience, or resiliency. Instead, I looked for cases in which a participant described a setback and how he or she bounced back. My codebook developed accordingly. My initial codebook included 113 codes. These codes were later grouped into 12 major codes.

In addition to Owen's (1984) suggestions for thematic analysis, I also looked for "ah-ha" moments or instances when the participants noted something of particular interest that might be used to engage other participants in discussion. For example, the third interview participant discussed what she believed was the importance of "productive empathizing" with her subordinates. I was then able to explore this idea in subsequent interviews. This led to interesting discussions about the positive and negative effects of venting or commiserating.

As suggested by Lindlof and Taylor (2011), during open coding I developed theoretical memos, which served to "flesh out the thematic meanings of the categories" (p. 251). Once the open coding stage was complete, I moved into axial coding. Axial coding is the process of "creating a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 252). In order to make the volume of data more manageable, I used a color-coding system in which I highlighted text on electronic and hard copies of the transcripts based on research question. I then created Word documents for each of the three research questions with groupings of color-coded transcripts. This allowed me to better identify concepts and ideas.

Buzzanell's (2010) five processes for developing resilience—(a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communicative networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive ones—served as a starting point for my coding and thematic analysis of Research Question 2. My goal in answering Research Question 2 was to draw upon Buzzanell's existing framework but to leave myself open to new findings. Buzzanell referred to her five processes as "springboards for theory development" (2010, p. 9) and said she believed other communicative processes were involved in the development of resilience. As discussed in Chapter 4, I believe I was successful in uncovering additional processes that are involved in the process of resilience.

Morse, Barrett, Myan, Olson and Spiers (2008) argue that high-quality qualitative research is iterative rather than linear and that a good researcher will move back and forth between research design and implementation. Throughout the entire analysis process, I strategically and deliberately moved back and forth between the literature, my transcripts, memos, and emerging codes to clarify ideas and ensure that my analysis was grounded in the literature and was connecting ideas in new and insightful ways. As Silverman and Marvasti (2008) suggest, I pushed myself to go beyond recognizing themes to discover new ways to link ideas. For example, I turned to the professional services literature to explore the concept of client capture. Through memos I was able to apply this concept to marketing agencies in a fresh way.

Creswell (2014) suggested that those who engage in qualitative research "support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (p. 4). Throughout my process of analysis, I worked to understand and render the complexity of the phenomenon of resilience.

In order to ensure that my analysis met standards for high-quality qualitative work, I engaged in several strategies described by influential authors in the field of qualitative research to demonstrate a rigorous analysis. These included constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), continuing data collection until saturation was reached (Morse et al,, 2002), and conducting member checks (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Further, I committed myself to methodological awareness, which Seale (1999) described as "a commitment to showing as much as possible to the audience of research studies … the procedures and evidence that have led to particular conclusions, always open to the possibility that conclusions may need to be revised in light of new evidence" (p. x).

Throughout the entire process, I met with my advisor to reflect on my findings and gain additional insight, which provided the tactic for confirming findings described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as triangulation by researcher. Based on our discussions, I returned to the transcripts and the literature to push for stronger and more insightful connections and contributions to the literature.

Member Checks

Qualitative researchers believe people with the lived experience are "at least partially knowledgeable about the customs, activities, rituals, and so forth in which they participate" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 279). Member checks are "a method sometimes used to validate participants' responses to a researcher's conclusions about them (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2002) or to confirm findings with primary informant sources (Leininger, 1994)" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 3). During the analysis process I conducted member checks with seven participants to confirm findings, test theories, and further explore themes that emerged from the data. Member checks were conducted in person, by phone, and via email to respect the time and schedule constraints of the professionals.

Storage of Confidential Information

All material related to the research process, including the consent forms, will be retained in a secure location for three years after the conclusion of the study.

Summary

This study used a qualitative approach to examine how professionals who work in client-facing roles in marketing communications agencies experience resilience when they face trigger or springboard events at work. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided the data for this study, which were analyzed using the process of open and axial coding. Chapter 4 presents the results of this analysis, describing the types of situations that these professionals consider triggers for resilience, the communicative tools these professionals call upon during their processes of resilience, and how successful recovery changes how people report enacting resilience when faced with subsequent trigger events.

Chapter 4: Results

The objective of my research was to better understand how client-facing employees experience resilience when they received setbacks on the job, in particular negative performance feedback from clients and colleagues. Resilience is emerging in the communication literature, drawing from established theory and empirical findings in psychology (Buzzanell, 2010). The literature commonly describes the process of resilience as "bouncing back" (for examples see Buzzanell, 2011; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Moenkemeyer et al., 2012; and Torres & Fyke, 2013). While resilience is still not completely understood, it is believed to be an important capacity. Despite the fact that researchers now believe resilience is at least in part something that can be developed, little academic research has been dedicated to "how people develop resiliency in themselves and others" (Luthans et al., 2006, p. 35). I designed my dissertation research presented in this manuscript to add to the emerging body of literature on individual resilience in the workplace.

To explore individuals' experiences with resilience, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 professionals who worked in the account management or account service departments of marketing communication agencies. This population was chosen because, by nature of the work they do, these employees receive frequent feedback from clients and colleagues. Frequent messages of criticism combined with fierce competition, demand for creativity, tight deadlines, and long work hours makes careers in this field stressful for the practitioner (Career Cast, 2010; Crenshaw, 2013). However, despite critique and rejection, these professionals must bounce back and bring new work and new ideas to their clients on a routine basis. I posit that professionals who succeed in continuing to work in marketing communication agencies must enact a form of resilience that allows them to carry on with their work. The professionals who participated in interviews were working in agencies at the time of the interview. Interview participants' experience in this role ranged from one year to 25 years. On average, participants had 11 years of experience. While the context of marketing communication firms was the subject of this study, professionals who work in client services and/or creative environments in other areas of the knowledge economy likely face similar situations.

Semi-structured interviews covered questions regarding individuals' experiences bouncing back from difficult situations at work. Interviews were conducting in person and over the phone. Interviews averaged 44 minutes (range 18-60 minutes). These interviews generated 981 minutes of audio recordings and 426 pages of single-spaced transcripts. All interviews were professionally transcribed.

The following research questions were posed and answered through semi-structured interviews:

RQ1: What are participants' accounts of situations at marketing communication agency that require resilience?

RQ 2: What are some of the communicative processes people call upon to activate resilience when faced with springboard or trigger events at work?

RQ3: How does successful recovery from a trigger event change how people report they enact resilience when faced with subsequent springboard or trigger events?

Detailed descriptions of the themes from participants' responses with example quotes are included in this chapter. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5. The remainder of this chapter summarizes the themes present in accounts provided by study participants. Interview data are organized and examined by research question. Themes are discussed and illustrated by participants' responses. Pseudonyms are used in place of real names in all cases.

Accounts of Successful and Unsuccessful Recovery from Trigger Events at Work

The first research question (RQ1) asked participants to describe their own experiences with springboard events they believe required them to activate their own resilience. When conducting interviews, I did not define resilience. I asked about experiences commonly associated with resilience because I wanted to hear participants describe resilience.

The interview population consisted of professionals who work in the account management or account service departments of marketing communication agencies. These professionals receive frequent feedback on their work from clients and colleagues. The role of those in account management (AM) is to be the client's representative at the agency, and the agency's representative at the client's organization (Advertising Education Foundation, 2014). This role can make the account management professional the target of criticism from both the client and colleagues within the agency who disagree with the client. The AM's job can be stressful because of tight deadlines, demanding clients, frequent rejection of ideas, and long work hours. In its annual studies of "America's Most Stressful Jobs," Career Cast has consistently ranked public relations officer/executive and advertising account executive in its list alongside jobs such as police officer, firefighter, surgeon, and enlisted military personnel. The stressful nature of the job was confirmed by interview participants of this research. As is described in more detail in the following sections, participants provided accounts of frequent interactions with clients who berated them, changed their minds frequently, killed the agencies' ideas, and were generally difficult to please. These interactions were described as trigger events for the activation of resilience.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the presence of a trigger or springboard event is an important way resilience differs from other positive constructs such as hope or optimism (Bonanno, 2004; Luthans et al., 2006). "The capacity for resilience promotes the recognition and acknowledgement of such impact, allowing the affected individual the time, energy, and resource investment to recover, rebound, and return to an equilibrium point" (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 779). The present research posits that negative performance feedback can provide such a springboard event. Therefore, the first research question asked participants to provide accounts of trigger events they believed required them to tap into their own resilience. The following section provides participants' accounts of difficult situations they experienced at work but from which they believed they have successfully recovered.

Research Question 1: What are participants' accounts of successful and unsuccessful recovery from springboard or trigger events at work?

Participants' accounts of springboard events that required them to tap into their own resilience can be grouped into three categories: (a) negative performance feedback, (b) repeated "killing" of creative and/or strategic ideas, and (c) prolonged periods of stress due to volume of work and high expectations. In some cases, participants' accounts reflect a combination of these categories.

Category 1: Negative performance feedback. Participants' accounts consistently described receiving negative performance feedback as an incident that required them to tap into their own resilience. Participants generally seemed to accept that their roles required them to be able to take a high level of critique and that clients would not always be pleased with their work. Participants, such as Will, a 14-year industry veteran, shrugged off the ability to take some criticism as "just part of the job." However, Will and others acknowledged there are situations at work when the feedback—either because of the content, frequency, or delivery—is difficult to take. Anna, a vice president who had been with her boutique public relations agency for 15 years at the time of her interview, said the frequency and emotional nature of the feedback can be “just exhausting” and can require resilience to get through from day to day.

The type of feedback acted as a trigger event for resilience and was often intense, dramatic, and emotionally charged. This feedback, in many cases, was delivered by a client who was yelling or screaming. Anna said in her 18 years in the industry, she had a great deal of experience with receiving feedback that required resilience. For example, she described a situation in which she received hostile feedback from a long-standing client when her team failed to meet his expectations:

> I got yelled at for 48 minutes—I timed it—by our client. Because the costs of the program that we had developed or were expanding, we weren’t hitting the deadlines that he wanted us to hit, that we didn’t actually know. That was just such a wear and tear. We’d worked so hard and put a lot into it, and it probably wasn’t where it needed to be. I don’t think any of us doubted that. It was on the phone, which made it worse because he could dehumanize me, so to speak. He could just rant. There was nothing that I could say. No logic entered this conversation whatsoever. He was a client that we knew would calm down a couple days later, but even so, he was pretty mad. It was embarrassing, because other people saw this, and since I took the brunt of it, it was hard. I think people were supportive, but nobody wants to sit in a room for 45 minutes while people are watching you, knowing you’re getting yelled at on the phone by your client. I was smart enough to know that on that particular call, I had a couple comments that I could say calmly to try to even it out a little bit, but most of it was accepting the venting.

Anna was not the only participant to share an account of a client who yelled. In fact, most participants had a battle story to share. For example, Will, who reported that an ability to take criticism was “just part of the job,” described an emotional phone call with a client about a project that was behind schedule:

> He lost it. He just started screaming. And I said, “You gave it to us on Memorial Day and we’ve been really busy working on it these last five weeks.” And he just really like, “Why is this so fucking difficult?” He really went off. I’m sitting there on the other side of the phone steaming a little bit because he was unprofessional, not to mention we’re giving him this work at an unbelievably bargained rate to help their company.

For Lori, an account director with 11 years of agency experience, difficult situations at work were not caused by a client who yelled but by a client who delivered feedback in way Lori found humiliating. She explained that the client “didn’t yell. He was very good at speaking to you so condescendingly to you in the middle of a meeting in front of a room full of people above you and below you, to just make you feel like the smallest person in the world.” As she recounted the story, she explained that her immediate reaction is to “always try to take the high road” and that “as a person on the agency side I ultimately just have to.”

Chelsea, a 10-year agency veteran, described dealing with harsh feedback from a client during the early days in her career as an emotional experience. “[The feedback] can really hurt your feelings . . . If you messed up, [the client is] all over you about it, and it really hurt my feelings in those first couple of years.” Chelsea reported that in the early years of her career, she found herself “crying in the bathroom, getting really worked up about it” but over time, she “realized okay, this is just how [the client] carries herself. She is very confrontational.”

These accounts touch on a common experience and common result for agency professionals. Participants in this research expressed the belief that if the client wants to yell or speak in a harsh or condescending manner, it is incumbent upon the agency person to take it. The normative nature of client incivility is addressed in Chapter 5.

Although many participants' accounts involved a client who yelled, screamed, or was otherwise impolite, participants also spoke of situations in which emails detailing the person's or team's shortcomings were trigger events. For example, Phillip, a partner in a mid-size, full-service marketing agency, described feedback from a client when the client believed he and his team were failing on a project:

> The bullets were coming right at me, and it was absolutely then the most stressful weekend of my life because all day Saturday, there were emails going back and forth and there was a call on Sunday morning and coming back, I think I was planning taking a day off Monday but of course major blow up on Sunday night and you're hitting the ground running up Monday morning and you know the way that it's going to be a nightmare and it literally was for the better part of I'd say the following 10 days, a back and forth real struggle.

Phillip's account was not unusual. Scathing email from a client was frequently cited as an example of an event that required resilience. Helen, an agency account director with 12 years of experience, discussed a time in which she had difficulty coping with a feedback email from a client with high expectations:

> I wouldn't say her expectations were unreasonable but they were high, real high, and our agency had not staffed the account with enough people. We were all overworked and overextended. I was working no less than 60 hours a week. My client sent an email that

> was probably 600 words long about what the team and I were doing wrong, all the things that were not good enough. I did not disagree with everything she said. Some of it was true. It was really hard to hear. I cried over that account a lot. After that email I cried for sure. I was exhausted and I just didn't have any more to give. I talked to the team, I talked to my manager. I tried to rally. I had to psych myself up every day to come into work. I dreaded it when her number popped up on my caller ID. Sometimes I wouldn't answer because I needed to call her back on my own terms, when I was in the right frame of mind. Mostly I just hoped she wouldn't leave a message and would email me instead because it just pained me to have to talk to her after that. Which I know sounds crazy because she was my client and that's my job.

Similarly Alice, the supervisor of a public relations team at a large full-service agency, and had worked in the industry for 10 years at the time of her interview, discussed a situation in which she and her team received feedback from a client about the team's performance:

> Our whole team, we could just never get it together for her. She'd have these high expectations and we kept missing. Because we were all so busy and working on so many things and I remember getting this long email from her. It was like, "This needs to be done and this needs to be done. This isn't right." I remember thinking I feel like I've gotten punched in the stomach. It's not that I, it's not that this was wrong, it's correct. I remember it being a really difficult situation for me because the client wasn't wrong, and I couldn't use that as an excuse and I remember feeling like this is a really tough spot for everybody on the team and we needed to kind of bounce back from it somehow. And I really did have to psych myself up to even get in to work the next day.

Anna, Helen, and Alice noted in their accounts that the client had valid concerns. In these three cases, the participants agreed with some of the client's feedback. However, that did not make it easy for them to accept the feedback. As is discussed later, the agency professionals' own high expectations can sometimes make it more difficult for them to receive and rebound from critique.

Participants also described situations in which a client went around them to deliver negative feedback to someone with higher rank in the agency. Julia described a situation in which a client reported to her supervisor that Julia was too focused on her child with special needs to do her job well. "I was floored when it happened," she explained. "I was knocked to my knees. It was probably the most undermining that I've had done by a client, but it caught me completely by surprise. Completely by surprise."

Julia described this situation as particularly difficult for two reasons. First, Julia thought she had been servicing the client well. She described long hours in the office and frequent travel on behalf of the client. Second, Julia had thought she had a good relationship with the client. Therefore, the negative feedback hurt more than it might have if Julia did not believe she had a good relationship with the client.

While client feedback was a frequently described trigger, some participants spoke of feedback from their managers as situations that required resilience. For example, Rena, a vice president with a large New York advertising agency, discussed a conversation she had with her manager about her ability to manage a high-profile account:

> It was hard to hear that "you're not present" when all I do is work. Literally, I don't do anything else. That was really hard to hear. It made me often do a lot of reflection of like, "Is this what I really what I want to do for the rest of my life?"

Alice described a situation in which she received feedback that she disagreed with from her manager about her management style.

> He and I discussed it at the time and I was like, "I don't actually agree with you and here's why." We had a discussion about it and it should have been over, but I couldn't let it go, and I felt like every interaction I had with him for several weeks was marred by the fact that I was just like, "I cannot." I just could not bounce back from his feedback in that particular area.

The accounts from Rena and Alice point to the fact that it can be difficult for some people to bounce back from feedback that they believe is about them as individuals rather than about a failing project or missed deadline. "When someone critiques your management style, it's personal," Alice elaborated. "It's not like we were disagreeing about a project. It was a discussion about me as person, or it least it felt like it."

Chelsea described a situation in which she publicly learned she was not receiving a promotion. For her, this was a trigger event.

> One year, they were like, "Oh, we have promotions." I thought, "Yes, this is it for sure, the day." It was not and I was in my car crying for 30 minutes after that meeting. It was like in a lunch meeting that we had one time. I just was devastated. I called [my fiancé], cried to him. He tried to help. Called my best friend, talked to her. She tried to help. I eventually just pulled myself together, but I think I was in there for a good 30 minutes and then once you've been crying you can't just come back in because everyone's going to know you've been crying, so you have to wait for your face to no longer be red and splotchy, but yeah, I was devastated. I thought for sure that that was it. It was not. Because at the time, it was like when is it going to happen already?

Category 1 summary. In these accounts, participants explained their experiences rebounding from negative feedback from clients and colleagues. In many cases the feedback was emotionally charged because of the dramatic nature of the delivery or because the negative feedback felt like a personal attack on the receiver. While participants tended to agree that accepting and bouncing back from negative performance feedback is an expected part of the job, they acknowledged that successful recovery was not always easy. In fact, persistent negative feedback from clients and colleagues is one contributing factor to marketing communication's notoriously high turnover rate of approximately 30 percent (Ad Age, 2013; Stratz, 2012). The communicative tools these professionals report calling upon in order to rebound are discussed later in this chapter (see Research Question 2).

Category 2: Killing of ideas. A second category of situations in which agency professionals believed they drew upon their resilience is when their creative and strategic ideas were "killed" by clients. This issue was discussed in Chapter 1 as one of the factors that contributes to the high rate of turnover in marketing agencies. This issue is clearly a pain point with industry professionals, as frequently noted by authors of industry blogs. For example, in an article written for the professional networking site Linked-In, Paul Dervan, who is considered by some as a thought-leader in marketing, referred to clients as idea "assassins" (Dervan, 2015). The frustration associated with the killing of ideas was a strong theme among interview participants. For some, the repeated rejection required resilience. For others, the manner in which the ideas were rejected was the trigger that caused them to need to activate their resilience.

The work of account service professionals is to develop creative and strategic ideas to fit the client's marketing challenges. In order to ultimately find an idea the client will accept, account management teams often present several ideas. Anna, a public relations agency vice president, explained that her expectation “is that maybe one out of 10 [ideas] will make it.” Much like the reported assumption that account management must be able to take feedback (as discussed in the previous section), interview participants generally agreed that they must be able to handle rejection of ideas. However, there are situations in which either the frequency with which ideas are rejected or the manner in which they are rejected causes the account management professional to activate resilience in order to cope.

While most agencies have separate “Creative” departments that handle art direction and copy writing, among other things, account service professionals view themselves as creative people even if they are not labeled as such. As Henry explains: “We work in the world of words and ideas and thoughts and strategy. It’s personal; it’s a very exhausting, creative process we need to go through.” Participants of this research view their work as creative and feel attached to some of their work in a way that is stereotypically reserved for those in the Creative departments. Frances, a vice president of public relations, explained the way she feels about the work she does: “It’s like your blood, sweat, and tears is in this, and people are looking and judging.” Diane, a public relations professional with five years of experience, expressed a similar sentiment: “It’s your work that you’ve been doing that they’re talking about, so it’s like I put . . . You know we work so many hours a week. You pour so much into it, to not have somebody like it hurts.” Julia, a senior vice president, described a similar feeling: “I’m so personally vested, I think that’s the hard thing with [public relations] counseling because that’s what we do. This is my brain. This is my thinking. This is my passion. We get very defensive about it.”

The advertising literature has explored the attachment those in Creative departments have to their work (e.g. West, 1993). Hackley and Kover (2007), note that Creatives are commonly characterized as “quirky, insecure, brash and brilliant, and even mendacious” (p. 63). In their review of the literature, Hackley and Kover (2007) suggest that the work Creatives produce is closely tied to their own sense of identity. However, the way in which those professionals who work in account management may attach to their work and build identity is not explored in the literature. This notable gap in the literature echoes what account management professionals experience in practice.

Interview participants generally agree that others, such as clients and account management professionals, are generally more delicate with feedback given to members of the Creative department than they are when giving feedback to account management professionals. It is often the account management professional who takes direct feedback from a client and then delivers it to the Creative teams. Account management professionals are often trained to deliver feedback in a way the Creative teams will accept it. Anna, a public relations vice president, who had been working with creative teams for 18 years at the time of her interview, said:

> I think about the difference between us and the creatives, where everything has to be approached in such a sensitive way, because they're so sensitive. But, it's perfectly acceptable to give feedback to [account people] and get right into it. It's not that hard to say at the top, "Nice effort, nice job, nice work. Here's the feedback." I think that sometimes that's lost on people, that just because you're not producing a physical ad doesn't mean that you didn't have blood, sweat, and tears going into the project.

Anna explained that the professional veneer account service people put forth might be one of the reasons feedback to them is delivered more harshly than it is to creatives. "With the creatives, you assume there's a tortured artist in there somewhere." She contrasted with this the stereotype of the account management professionals. "Our teams are so built toward that Type A, that 'I've got it all under control and I'm so professional all the time,' I don't think it occurs to people that there might be a sensitive being underneath."

Some account management professionals described the emotional and mental fatigue of putting in long hours to try to develop an idea the client will ultimately love but which is ultimately rejected. Anna explained:

> I think what's really hard is when you try, try, try so hard to get to that one thing that's going to sell it, and that wears you down. You can get stuck and sucked in, and it's overwhelming and complicated. That's when I think it's hard for teams to follow along and to recover. So, if you put all this energy and spent way too much time trying to present one thing that they're going to love, that's hard.

A recurring theme present in the accounts of participants was the need to mentally prepare to deliver creative ideas for clients who have a history of killing or rejecting ideas. Finley, an account director with seven years of experience, said it can be hard for her to "psyche herself up" to want to deliver new ideas:

> You see a reoccurring history. You start to see that 'Oh, we brought all these good ideas and then they died. They died in the presentation,' or 'we brought all these really good ideas and they gave them to another agency to do,' or 'Once again, they didn't have the budget they thought they were going to have.'

For some, the process of having ideas continually rejected by clients is something that can shake confidence in one's own abilities. "That's when it starts to really weigh on you with that client," Chelsea explained. "If you don't have any success with them, after a while it can affect your mindset and your ability to do something, thinking that you can produce something successful for them."

The feeling of mental or emotional fatigue when facing the pressure to continually deliver creative ideas was echoed by several participants. Some professionals said it would be easier for them to bounce back if their ideas were rejected outright. They spoke of frequent "maiming" of ideas as sometimes harder to recover from than outright rejection. "I think it is disheartening when you get a really good one that you're super excited about," Anna said. "It's almost better to have something completely killed than just watered down to where it's just the most wimpy whatever piece of work that you don't even want to put your name on." Heather, an account director with 12 years of experience, described her mental fatigue with the "tinkering" of the agency's ideas by the client. "They critique and change and revise. By the time you get to the end, it wasn't our original recommendation." Finley offered a similar point of view: "that can be frustrating . . . it always ends up being one tenth of what we presented. It's very whittled down and kind of shabby, not something I want to work on actually."

Angeline recounted a time in which she and her team "poured their hearts and souls" into reconcepting a project the client ultimately watered down:

> There were a lot of 10 o'clock evenings to make sure the next round met their expectations. Then the huge program that we presented ended up being so watered down that it was not even the idea that we presented. That was a little frustrating, just thinking about how explicit the client was that we didn't deliver what they wanted. We put in so much time and energy. We ate chips and salsa for dinner here for like a week. We brought out the presentation but then when it came to execution on their end, it just became this program that no one still is proud of.

When she discussed this example, Angeline mentioned the program is still a pain point with the client organization and that those who joined the marketing team after the project was put in place are quick to criticize the agency for it. She said:

> The new clients over there talk about it. I'm like, "Well, that wasn't what we presented. Here's the big idea we presented. Here's what your team delivered." They didn't want to do the work and push. They didn't want to have the 10 o'clock nights like we put in to make it come to life. That was all on their end.

The feeling that the work was "for nothing" was a common sentiment when discussing the frustration associated with this situation. "When you've sacrificed sleep and your sanity, it's hard to accept that it was all for nothing," said Helen, an account director, during a member check. "It's hard for me to recover," said Alice, "when I'm already feeling overworked and tired and rejected and then a client waters down the ideas we've been killing ourselves to get right. It makes me just want to say 'I'm done' but I never do."

When asked why the watering down of ideas is so difficult for her, Finley said:

> I think it goes back to the type of people we are. In this industry, it's folks that think big and want to do the best and so the best isn't going to be like a parsed down version of the cool idea you had over here, especially if you have knowledge of the cool idea. The end result may still be impactful and interesting, but the fact that you knew it used to look like this. It could be a little bit of like … It's like if you were to marry someone that looked like Brad Pitt and then he ended up looking like Danny DeVito five years later. Would you be a little bitter? It's that every day reality of waking up looking less like Brad Pitt, more like DeVito.

As stated previously, this industry has a turnover rate of approximately 30 percent, which is higher than all industries other than travel and tourism. Heather, an account director, believes the constant rejection leads to burnout and turnover on the account. She said:

> There is a lot of rejection. A lot of new ideas that are presented and killed almost immediately. You get burnt out and you feel like you need something fresh to do. You have a lot of those instances, yeah, I want to leave, too, if you feel like you're never getting anywhere and you're consistently presenting things over and over and over again and not getting anywhere, sure.

Chelsea, an account director, discussed having trouble keeping an account staffed due to the continued pressure to develop new ideas by clients who frequently change their minds:

> It's hard because it's a client and they're paying us to handle and do their business. They're paying us for our ideas. They're paying us for our input, but it's a tricky balance. We've been with them for a long time, and I don't think anyone's willing to walk away from the relationship, but I think we've got to get this issue under control because to constantly have people change their minds, especially a client with different directions, it wears on you so much that you don't want to work on their business anymore. That's a problem. It's a big problem.

Category 2 summary. In their accounts, participants discussed the rejection or killing of ideas as trigger events for resilience. Participants said they sometimes feel emotionally attached to their ideas and work in a way that is generally associated with the so-called creatives within the agency (specifically those professionals who work in the Creative department). While the existing literature discusses the delicate balance associated with delivering feedback to the marketing agency creatives, scant attention has been paid to the account managers who view themselves as professionals who deliver creative and innovative marketing ideas. As is discussed in Chapter 5, this is an opportunity for future research.

Category 3: Workload pressures. A third category of events that account service professionals pointed to as requiring them to activate resilience are the prolonged periods of long hours, heavy workloads, and high expectations. These periods of long work hours are usually connected to the grind of churning out new ideas that was discussed in the previous section. Thus, in some cases, it is the combination of the demanding mental and emotional work combined with the long hours that causes these professionals to activate resilience. In the following section, participants describe how and why workload pressures require resilience.

Anecdotal evidence from interview participants is that they are expected to bill clients for approximately 2,000 hours a year. To meet their billable hours demands, those interviewees said they frequently must put in 50 or 60 hours per week. In addition, they report to be "on call" and available to clients at all times. For example, Diane, a senior account executive, reported to feel pressure to respond quickly to client emails no matter when they are sent. "If I get an email at 11 p.m., does the client expect an immediate response? Some do."

Beyond the hours worked, participants also discussed the expectation to manage heavy workloads, creating situations that call for resilience. For some, such as Diane, Helen, and Finley, the heavy workload causes them to have periods in which they believe they need to activate resilience. Diane, who has worked in public relations for five years, explained, "For me times that have been lower points have been, in terms of workload like extreme stress everything, to not enough people to help. Hours and hours and hours of work a week." Finley, an account supervisor, offered a similar perspective:

> There can be a daily grind there where it's like every day it's . . . You're busting your butt to meet deadlines and write documents and get things over and get things approved and get things up and it just doesn't ever relax.

Helen, an account director who has worked in agencies and as a client, described the pressure she has felt working at an agency as more intense than what she experienced in her roles in two different corporate marketing departments:

> I think in an agency setting, the resilience that is needed is that daily kind, because it's really bad getting yelled at, of course it is. But, it's also the daily feeling of there's so much to do, and you haven't done it, or the client's expectations are always going to be a little bit higher, or you've worked really hard for something and all of a sudden there's a typo, and you want to die.

The typical account manager has numerous client contacts who may have conflicting opinions and priorities. On average, participants of this research worked with five client organizations and had 18 client contacts who may direct the work of the agency. Rena, who had a total of 70 individual client contacts at a large New York City agency, described working with too many individual clients with conflicting needs and priorities, which created a workload that was too heavy and unreasonable in her opinion. "The sheer number of people in volume was just too much." She eventually left the agency.

Participants were mixed in their feelings about whether the pressure to put in long hours was worse at the beginning of their careers. Some, such as Helen, said she felt she needed to put in more hours at the beginning of her career to prove herself. "During my first year at my first agency job, I never left the office before my manager, and it was not just for show either. I always had plenty of work to do." Henry, a sole proprietor said, "Unfortunately when you're 24 and you're getting into the industry you are a commodity, and it's expected for you to work 65 hours a week and that's what you signed up for."

Henry explained that as his career has progressed, it is not the hours but the need to be accessible to clients around the clock that causes the most stress for him. Other participants echoed the pressure to constantly be available to clients. "There's some clients who think they have a lot of money and that you are there for their every beck and call because of that, so you kind of suck it up," explained Rachel, a supervisor who has worked at three agencies during her nine-year career. Michelle said over the course of her 15-year career she has increasingly felt pressure to never be "off" work:

> You're maybe home and it's 10 o'clock at night. I think the expectations are so much higher too, just that you should be, that because I can reach you at any time, you should be available at any time. For me, I don't turn off. That's good for clients, but it's not so good for I'd say sometimes my family or for me personally because I don't have that, "Okay, this is stop time and now I need to . . . " I'm never off.

Kathy, who works for a prominent global public relations firm, also said she feels pressure to put in long hours and to "always be accessible and checking email" just in case "they (the clients) need something." She explained:

> It's a 24/7 job. It's not like you can just turn it off on the weekend and then log back in on Monday to see and start working again. . . . Anything can happen at any point and I just need to be available and accessible.

Helen said the stress associated with the need to be accessible to clients at all times is one of the reasons for turnover in her firm:

> I think the reasons people leave here are the hours and the demanding clients. It's hard to feel like you have to be "on" all the time. Like everyone else, I want some downtime. I don't want to feel like I always need to be checking my email, but I do. If a client emails me at 11 p.m., I'm going to email back. Even if I don't have the answer I'll respond just to respond, so the client knows they were not outworking me. God, isn't that sad? We all do it though. We cannot have the client thinking they are working harder than us. It's a sickness. At least with email I reasonably have a little bit of time before I have to respond. Now I have clients texting me, and I need to respond right away. Because that's why they texted because they want an immediate response. Or maybe they don't, but it feels that way.

Some participants, such as Frances, a seasoned account director, and Jane, an assistant account manger with two years of experience, acknowledged some of the pressure is self-imposed. As Frances explained:

> I have definitely had bouts of serious anxiety over things that usually are . . . It is never as bad as you think. It's your mind just gets going on it. Just the pressure that I will tend to put on myself in certain situations, and then not in other situations. I have never really figured out what it is, but I think usually it is this perceived expectation and a worry that I might not meet that expectation is usually when it gets me. The thought of when I created my mind of what the judging that might be occurring of what I delivered.

Similarly, Jane said:

> It's a lot of work, and it's a lot of things that need to be done quickly for a lot of different people. None of your clients know what else you're working on. In their mind, you're dedicated to them, which is fine. I want them to think that. I want them to think that,

> "Hey, I've got Jane in my back pocket and she's going to make something happen if I need to make it happen."

As was described in Chapter 2, the industry acknowledges that marketing agencies attract "Type A" personalities who put a great deal of pressure on themselves (Crawford, 2014, cited in Mumbrella, 2015). Finley said the professionals who are attracted to the industry put themselves under a lot of pressure to work long hours, do great work, and meet high expectations. These professionals take their work seriously, as Finley explained. "They're not going to phone it in, they're going to work really hard to do a great job." She continued:

> The other part is, yeah, I think this industry can cause stress … basically because in my experience the brand teams, regardless of the industry you work in, the brand teams that reach out to you often treat you as an extension of their own marketing team so you feel the pressure that your brand team feels. If there's a sales meeting next Monday and that presentation has to be done, that's your presentation that has to be done. If there's a new product launch at the end of the month, you'd better believe you are working on that new product launch just like you were launching the product.

Category 3 summary. Participants' accounts describe workload pressures that can serve as triggers for resilience. The long hours combined with heavy workload and high expectations can be emotionally and physically exhausting for these professionals. Some participants also discussed the feeling of being constantly available to clients by email, phone, and text as a factor that contributes to the exhausting nature of the job.

Summary of research question 1. As illustrated by these accounts, account service professionals who participated in this research believe their jobs are stressful and that to be successful in these jobs account service professionals must activate resilience. An analysis of their accounts shows their springboard or trigger events can be grouped into three categories: (1) negative performance feedback, (2) repeated "killing" of creative and/or strategic ideas, and (3) prolonged periods of stress due to volume of work and high expectations. During interviews participants shared accounts of successful and unsuccessful recovery from these trigger events. The communicative processes these professionals report to call upon when activating resilience will be discussed in the following section.

Research Question 2: What are some of the communicative processes people call upon when faced with springboard or trigger events at work?

The second research question asked which specific communicative processes participants believe are involved in the process of resilience. In keeping with Buzzanell (2010) and Torres and Fyke (2013), my research specifically treated resilience as a process. Treating resilience as an emergent process is one way in which the communicative perspective on resilience differs from other positive scholarship. Through a process perspective, resilience is viewed as "dynamic, integrated, unfolding over time and through events, evolving into patterns, and dependent upon contingencies" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 2).

This perspective also treats resilience as developable capacity, thus treating resilience as a capacity that individuals can grow. In contrast, much of the literature on resilience in the workplace treats resilience as a trait or resource rather than as a state and developable capacity (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). This static view of resilience ignores the process and antecedents of resilience and focuses on the outcomes of resilience.

The communication literature, specifically Buzzanell (2010), suggested five specific communicative processes "that enhance people's abilities to create new normalcies" (p. 9). The processes Buzzanell proposed are: (a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communicative networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive ones.

There is evidence of each of these processes in the accounts of participants of this study. However, most dominant were maintaining and using communicative networks and putting alternative logics to work. Additionally, participants spoke at length about the important role of giving themselves time and “faking it” in the process of resilience. These four processes or strategies—(a) maintaining and using communicative networks, (b) putting alternative logics to work, (c) getting perspective, and (d) faking it—are discussed in detail and illustrated with quotes from participants.

Strategy 1: Maintaining and using communicative networks. Buzzanell (2010) described maintaining and using communication networks as the process by which individuals and groups build social capital and cash in on it during difficult times. Every person who participated in an interview for this research pointed to the important role social support has played in helping them rebound from difficult events at work. Participants typically referred to this process as venting or commiserating.

The ability to vent or commiserate with others clearly plays a role in the process of bouncing back for those interviewed. Anna, a vice president who has been with her public relations agency for 15 years, expressed a sentiment shared by many: “I need to feel like someone else understands where I am, I’m not alone in this.” Similarly, Helen, who has 14 years of industry experience, said it is therapeutic for her to “hash it out with friends, either work friends or outside of work friends.” She added, “I like talking it through.”

Some participants, such as Angeline and Chelsea, described the need to vent as just part of who they are. “I feel like I need to get it out to someone else,” said Angeline, a vice president.

"I'm that type of person." Chelsea, an account supervisor, said, "I very much need to talk everything out." Chelsea elaborated: "That's how I work through things. I don't want to sit and internalize. I work through problems, I work through issues by getting different people's points of view on it." Both Chelsea and Angeline described venting as part of their recovery process. "Personally, yeah, that's tremendously helpful for me to talk with other people," said Chelsea.

For some, venting is therapeutic and a critical tool for bouncing back from work stress. For example, Rena, a vice president of an international advertising agency, explained the important role of her communicative network in helping her relieve her work stress:

> [A colleague and I] bonded very quickly. One of the things that we would do, because both of us found our jobs very frustrating at times, was drink alcohol. We were having a really big problem or we needed to be calm and get it out, we actually would set up a meeting, we would leave the office, we would go to the bar and we would have a glass of wine and talk it out. It was therapy. It was seriously therapy because I had an outlet. It was a divine outlet, no one was going to judge me. I could vent, she could also vent to me, and we knew that this was our therapy sessions. Our time to get it out and move on. And having a glass of wine too, obviously just helps to level you out a little bit. But then she got pregnant, and I was so happy for her because she really wanted this, but I did not have my outlet anymore. There was another person, he was a guy who was my colleague, he was a project manager. So I switched it because I couldn't go drink with her anymore, I started smoking again, I hadn't smoked in many, many years. He was a smoker, so any time we felt frustrated, we'd go out and have a smoke. It was pretty bad habits, but it was because I needed that therapy time.

Venting or commiserating plays a role in the process of bouncing back for many participants. However, participants were mixed about whether venting should be done with colleagues or with trusted friends or family members. Rachel, an account supervisor who believed venting should be done at work, explained:

> Within the work walls I think you should absolutely vent. There's sometimes where it's just a terrible day and you need that person to talk to or you ask your friend to go take a walk around the block with you, get it all out and it kind of helps. And I think that it's healthy and I always encourage that. I've have numerous times where I can go with work friends and I bitch about something and they bitch about something, but at least we got over it.

While Rachel discussed the importance of commiserating with colleagues, other participants expressed reluctance to vent or commiserate with colleagues. Instead they looked to others in their social network when they needed to vent about work. Frances, a vice president with 14 years of experience, said:

> I definitely talked through those issues for sure. For me, I think I try . . . is certainly certain confidantes that you have at work and then at home, and there are probably, there fewer of those types of people at work. There's only so many people within your office that you feel like you can really I think open up to.

Lori, an account supervisor, reported that she preferred to discuss work issues with her husband:

> For me, a good outlet, which I think has actually evolved over time, is actually communicating with my husband when I get home. To be clear he has no idea what I do. He does not understand advertising, he doesn't have any idea, you come home and tell him things and he's like, I don't, I don't understand. … What we both realized after being

> married for about 10 years is, I don't want your answers, I don't want your solutions, I just want to talk about it with you.

Henry, a sole proprietor, also reported the value of venting to his spouse:

> I think you need to vent. I think we're only human. My wife is very used to me venting. I can, I don't whine, I probably some people think I whine she would think I whine. I don't whine I just, I'm a very expressive guy and I can't hold the stuff in for too long. I blow up. And I let it go. I think you need to you need to have that out.

Julia explained the importance of her network to her recovery from negative performance feedback from a client. In her account, Julia explained she had trouble bouncing back when she realized a client had publically criticized her for seeming "distracted at work," arguing she was focused on caring for her infant with special needs. Julia described the social support she received from colleagues as critical to her recovery:

> I had a team of people around me, in my office that were supporting me. They knew that I did the best possible job. They also knew that there wasn't . . . There is always a little bit of truth in whatever our client said, but they knew that it wasn't to the degree in which they were saying. I think if I didn't feel like I had the support of my organization, I would not come to work.

Some participants said team commiseration makes it easier for them to tackle the everyday challenges of client service. For example, Diane said:

> It's like if you're putting in a 12- or 15-hour day, your colleagues are doing it too. You're all going to get a pizza together and sit in a conference room and hash it out. Then, you feel just like, eventually you're emotionally exhausted afterwards, but it's like a good high.

Venting with colleagues can be reassuring for some. Participants said that sometimes when they vent they are looking for validation from others that the client is wrong or unreasonable. "Maybe it's like reassuring yourself that it was the right thing," said Sherry, an account manager with seven years of experience. "For me, it's a little bit of, the venting is like, 'Wasn't I right?' Reassuring yourself that the presentation or whatever advice or counsel you gave was correct, so you need to push back more."

Venting and commiserating can help a team jell and possibly contribute to a more positive team environment. "I think it [venting] can bring a little group bonding," Kelly said. Chelsea explained that she has been part of teams that regularly engage in group venting:

> I don't want to say client bashing. That makes it sound worse than it was, but there would be some vent sessions, and I would talk with [colleagues]. But yeah, the ability to kind of just commiserate a little bit on if things were rough or things weren't going very well with a particular project, then we'll need to vent a little bit. It was helpful.

In her nearly 20 years of experience, Anna has experienced the benefit of commiserating with a team. She reported that the sharing of "war stories" can be helpful in the recovery process:

> I think it's helpful when there's a team involved. I think it's harder when it's just you. Being able to rely on your team, and being able to talk about it, whether it's the venting or the solution, whichever side of that you're on, I think is helpful. Eating is not the best way, although I enjoy it. I think laughing's always a good thing. Being able to find the humor in it, if you can . . . sometimes it takes a while . . . or at least being able to look back. Sometimes I'll share experiences of mine with other people, that I think are helpful. I don't know if that's helpful at all. I don't know if people actually want to hear other people's stories at that point in time. I like hearing other people's stories.

Venting or commiserating with discretion is important to some. This theme was particularly strong among participants in management roles. Angeline, an account director at a small public relations firm, said although she vents and commiserates with her peers, she tries "to mitigate that type of talk from my team." Rather she attempts to engage in "productive empathizing" with her team. "It's acknowledging that they or we didn't do anything wrong but then we still have to solve for the client's needs and what do we do to fix it."

Despite the fact that each participant interviewed mentioned venting as an important part of the process of resilience, most acknowledged venting is a double-edged sword. Participants' concerns about venting about work clustered around three main themes. First, too much venting with colleagues can lead to a negative culture. Second, too much venting—either with colleagues or friends and family—can ultimately become unproductive in the process of bouncing back. Third, individuals must be cautious about their venting confidantes. This became especially important for individuals as they became more senior in their agency.

"I've been in situations when it's probably toxic," said Helen of her experience with venting at work. Other participants shared Helen's concerns about a negative work environment. Kelly said, "I think sometimes if you complain about too much, and we've all done it, it still happens, but I think you just cause the whole team to have a bad attitude and then you find the work can suffer." Rachel, who said she was a strong believer in the importance of venting in the process of bouncing back, offered a similar sentiment. "I feel like if it's just constant nothing's ever right within a workplace and it's just a constant cycle of oh, I can't believe this or this is terrible, it kind of becomes cancerous very quickly," she said.

Helen, who has 14 years of experience, noted that she is able to seek social support from her friends who work in the same industry. In this way, she is able to commiserate with professionals who are in similar work environments but who are not directly involved in her work. The downside, she explained, is that this can lead to “obsessive venting” every time they get together. She explained:

> I’ve spent hours of my life talking through work problems with my girlfriends. I know the names of their bosses, their clients, their most despised colleagues. I know it all and they know all the same about me. We all find it cathartic. We all bitch about work too much. It’s cathartic but we were obsessed.

For some, venting does not cure the problem and may make it worse. Henry, who has more than 25 years of industry experience, explained that repeated venting “ drags you down and drags you down and drags you down” and “makes working for that client miserable.” Angeline, a public relations agency vice president, agreed. “I worry about venting too much and maybe I’ve just had challenging clients lately,” she said. “There was a period where I felt like I was venting a lot so I was like, ‘Maybe I just need to find other ways to show that I can handle it.’”

Rachel, an account supervisor who believes in venting at work, acknowledged that as she has become a senior member of her work team, she must be more careful about her venting behavior:

> Within the work walls I try to be mindful about how often I’m bitching just to make sure that I don’t necessarily contribute to like a really negative overall atmosphere. I think part of that is I’m a senior person now, so I need to be a team player when it makes sense. There’s going to be days when it’s terrible, and there may be six months where it’s terrible, but sometimes you just got to push through and it will get better. You’ve got to sell it when you’re a senior person. So that can be one of the unfortunate aspects of this business.

Finley, who was promoted to a supervisory role approximately one year before her interview, explained how her view of venting has changed as she has become a manager:

> I think that's tricky because I feel like the curse of the higher up I've moved, kind of, well, that can become a very fine line. I mean I think we all need . . . There is a time and an appropriate place for asking for advice, telling someone how you feel about a situation but I really think it's a fine line between that and then just reputation slandering, just poisoning other people against someone and so that's hard, that's tricky.

Those participants who were more experienced managers also discussed the delicate nature of venting appropriately. Anna, a vice president at her agency, acknowledged the difficulty she has in finding the right balance of letting her team see her frustration with clients and situations. "I think there might be a balance there in terms of letting your team see that there's some frustration there," she said. "I maybe tend to err too far on the side of venting with the folks, and then explaining why you shouldn't do that and why the client is also right," she said with a laugh. Frances, a vice president with nearly 15 years of experience, said she is conflicted about venting with her team. She explained that venting with her peers is useful because they "definitely reel [her] in occasionally" but she feels less comfortable venting with her subordinates. "Maybe it's like I don't want people that report to me to know all of my insecurities or something," said she.

Despite the fact that some managers believe it is "generally unprofessional," as Finley said, to vent or commiserate with subordinates, these same managers do see some value. "It is good to talk it out," said Frances. "Sometimes it's good to have those conversations even with people that report to you because sometimes it is good for them to see a few weaknesses. You know what I mean?" Rena, a vice president at a large New York City agency, said:

> There were times when I would sort of vent to my team, but I tried to limit it. Just to show your team that you're not just easy-breezy about everything, that you care, and you show passion through a little bit of venting and I think that's important you also not make it all about venting all the time and show them the steps of getting over it and moving on.

Rena's quote illustrates a point many participants made, which is that they believe for venting to play a role in bouncing back, it must ultimately be productive. For some, "productive" meant they were able to get the words out so they could move on. Others valued the role of venting because venting with others helped them ultimately form a plan. Anna explained, "It gets to the point where if you are just focusing on that, and you're not remembering to cap it up to a solution, then it's not helpful."

Kelly and Helen reported their venting to colleagues and friends, in some cases, put them into a cycle of negativity that, ultimately, was not useful in the process of bouncing back. "My fiancé and I were working at the same agency, and we brought so much of it home that it caused us to both be unhappy," said Kelly, a senior account manager with 10 years of agency experience. "We found ourselves every night bitching about work and then we'd go back the next day. Then it just . . . it was not a good cycle."

Helen, who discussed having a circle of friends within the industry, said she eventually realized her routine of venting with these friends was not productive after her parent commented on it. "I remember when I went back for my MBA my Dad telling me he was glad I'd meet some people outside of my industry," she said. "I'm pretty sure he meant that he was glad I would not be surrounding myself with people who were constantly talking about and complaining about work. Like I said, we were sort of obsessed. It was a bad cycle."

Finley explained that too much venting at work can be unprofessional and ultimately it reflects poorly on the venter:

> It actually negatively impacts that person. I think venting is meant to impact you and solve your problem but when it treads into negatively, potentially having a negative impact on someone else's reputation, that's when it's I'd feel like I need to pump the brakes for myself. I feel like I have been on the giving and receiving end of venting and if I feel like . . . if I'm listening to someone just having to talk it out and I feel like they're steering into that more negative territory, I just don't comment on it. I think especially if you're upset and frustrated with the person, it's hard to steer clear of that because that's just unprofessional, it's unkind, and then it's negative.

Strategy 1 summary. Participants reported maintaining and using their communicative networks in their individual processes of resilience. Specifically, participants reported that venting to trusted colleagues and friends was an important part of the process. For these participants, venting played several important roles in the process of bouncing back. First, venting allowed the individual to "get it out" and make sense of the incident or experience. Second, venting to others helped the individual feel that he or she was not alone. Third, when focused on being productive, venting could help the individual talk to life a plan or recovery course for overcoming an obstacle or negative situation. In some cases, venting or commiserating filled all of these roles.

Participants reported relying less on venting as a coping mechanism as they gained experience and status within their organizations. This change in the role of venting is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Strategy 2: Putting alternative logics to work. Putting alternative logics to work after a trigger event creates resilience through reframing (Buzzanell, 2010; Torres & Fyke, 2013). To reframe a situation is to change the way a person or group views a situation or opportunity. In the case of a setback, reframing allows individuals and groups to "create their own logics that enable them to reintegrate when facing adverse experience" (Torres & Fyke, 2013, para. 14).

For interview participants, this strategy was most obviously in play when participants spoke of empathizing with the client as a way of coping with a negative experience with the client. For example, Frances, who is vice president of a small public relations firm, said:

> We have a few clients that we've known for a long time, and we're like, "Man, they are going through something." That is one thing that I do see with some clients that are really difficult right now. I think they're just spinning. They're spinning because they have so much pressure on them.

Diane, a public relations account executive with five years of experience, said she tries to think about what might going on at the client's organization that would trigger negative feedback. "For example, did we really screw up or are they just facing internal pressure? Is it a volatile time at their company?"

Phillip, the owner of a mid-sized agency, explained that when he showed empathy for the client, he had an easier time accepting and even adjusting to their feedback. "Once you do that, you realize, you know what, we should have done a better job there and I have no problem saying that," he explained. "When the client delivers bad news or when they're really terrible to you, think about what they have going on right now," he continued. "Business is terrible. Their job is very well on the line. What you're feeling is one smidgen of what they're dealing with on a daily basis."

Henry, a sole proprietor who worked for two mid-sized agencies before going into business for himself, said he also tries to remind himself to maintain perspective. “What you do for [the client] is a tiny, tiny percentage of their daily life,” he said.

> We think it’s a big, huge deal and [that] they’re thinking about it all the time. They’re not, and so sometimes when I get a piece of work that they don’t understand, sometimes they’ll overreact and just get harshly critical of something because they haven’t had time to really think about it too much.

Anna said she sometimes attributes harsh tone or a condescending demeanor to the fact that the client “is insecure” in his or her job. Frances, who acknowledged empathizing with clients is easier to say than do, said that when a client speaks to her in a harsh way she thinks, “Wow. You must hate your job and your life because here in the real world, this is how we talk.”

Alice, an account supervisor, had similar views:

> I get it sometimes, they are stressed, their jobs are hard, too. They are spending a lot of money with us and it’s frustrating when something is not right. Sometimes though, clients just lash out and are out of line. It’s not like every time a client is hard on us, we have deserved it. The reasons range. Sometimes the client is having a bad day, sometimes something else is going on. Sometimes the clients are not that great at their own jobs – they lash out because they do not know what to do.

Julia, a senior vice president at a public relations firm, said it has taken her a long time to learn how to rebound from harsh feedback from clients. She said she started coping with those situations better when she started to understand the client’s struggles.

> I’ve actually thought about this a lot, is I think it’s a reflection of their own turmoil internally, especially in corporate cultures. The one place that they feel they can reach out

and lash out is at their agency partners. I think a lot of times, you'll deliver something to them that is directly on objective and scope and everything. Two weeks later, you've done everything wrong and haven't delivered what you're supposed to.

Strategy 2 summary. There is evidence in participants' accounts that putting alternative logics to work, particularly looking for explanations for a client's behavior, plays a role in their individual processes of resilience. This strategy was most evident when participants spoke of empathizing with the client as a way of coping with a negative experience with the client. This strategy was exclusively used by those interview participants with at least 10 years of experience. This may point to the fact that the strategy of putting alternate logics to work is a more advanced strategy than venting, for example. This idea is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Strategy 3: Maintaining perspective. A common theme among participants was that maintaining perspective about the job helped them bounce back from difficult situations at work. Account service professionals interviewed for this research acknowledged they get so caught up in their work and take it so personally that any piece of negative feedback can be devastating. In order to rebound, many participants referred to the important strategy of maintaining perspective or a balanced worldview. The maintaining of perspective can be categorized in three ways. First, some participants coped with difficult situations at work by maintaining a perspective about the nature of the work they do. A second way interview participants claimed to maintain perspective was by attempting to not take feedback personally. The third way participants reported to attempt to maintain perspective is by thinking through worst-case scenarios associated with the problem they are facing and realizing the reality was not as bad as the worst case. These three themes are discussed and illustrated with participant quotes.

Theme 1: We're not saving lives. Those who claimed to rebound from difficult situations at work by maintaining perspective about their actual job tended to note the lack of a "life or death" scenario in their job. Several participants made this point by comparing their jobs to the medical profession. For example, Kathy, a senior account executive, said: "At my office we like to say 'It's PR, not ER.'" Frances, a vice president, offered a similar account:

> This isn't rocket science, and we're not saving lives typically everyday. I'm not a brain surgeon. The work we do is not that it isn't important, and a lot of the work that we do is so important. We do a lot of good work, but no one's going to pass at the end of the day because this didn't . . . No one's going to die because of this. This is correctable and this is, at the end of the day, it's not that big of a deal. I think you have to have that attitude to get through a lot of the days in an agency.

Phillip described a situation in which he was mentally preparing for what he thought would be a difficult day at work. He explained that running into a friend who is a cardiovascular surgeon helped put his own day in perspective.

> All the way to school, the kids in the car, screaming and yelling through music player and I'm just thinking about what a stressful day I was going to have in advertising and I saw James dropping his kids off and I called to him and said, "How many surgeries you got?" He said, "I've got one in about 25 minutes and I've got another one that starts at 6 o'clock tonight," and that guy's going in with someone's life in his hand and he's cracking chests and he's going to have to … and it might be a very routine situation. I guess, it's routine as open heart surgery goes or it could be a very dire situation. And I just had to rationalize that this [advertising] is not life and death.

Theme 2: It's not me. Participants spoke of the often-difficult task of not taking feedback or unpleasant communication personally. Sherry, an account director, said she learned over time not to take criticism from her client personally. "She could be direct, and I knew that was her, but I knew not to take it personally," she said. Jane, an assistant account executive, said she tries not to take criticism personally by remembering the team nature of the work:

> "After you get through the initial phase of embarrassment, which is when you usually have to tell your superiors what went wrong, which is never a blast, you realize that you really weren't the only person responsible for it. This really isn't all your fault. There're eight other people that saw this that didn't notice it either. It's going to be OK, you know?"

Participants suggested that those who take criticism personally have a much harder time rebounding. For example, Anna said, "I definitely work with people who take things personally, and I know that. For people who take it personally, that's really got to suck." Doug, a partner in a mid-size, full-service agency explained:

> I think it's great to take pride in your work. We do purposeful work but you got to keep it in perspective. You can't go to the point of being devastated and start crying because somebody is yelling at you. You also can't go on the other side and say "Screw it, they're just a client." You got to try to keep it in the middle.

Several participants explained this gets easier with experience. For example, Henry explained:

> We all get wrapped up in what we do, and it's hard to not take it personally. I mean and it's hard to not take criticism as a personal affront. I think that's just part of human nature but I think you just if, you can't just turn it off, but I think as you get older and more experienced you just learn to compartmentalize things, you know?

Rena specifically mentioned her ability to not take things personally has allowed her to recover from difficult and stressful situations at several large advertising agencies on the East Coast. She explains:

> I've learned over time not to take it personally and really ask enough questions and collaborate enough to get to the root of the problem. Then I don't take it as negative feedback. It's just like "your point of view, here's my point of view, let's figure out how to compromise."

Theme 3: All bad things go away. Another theme that seemed to help participants deal with difficult times at work was the idea, "this too shall pass." Participants spoke of the idea that the incident that weighs so heavily on them one day, eventually gets easier to bear. "There are all sorts of ways that eventually it works itself out," said public relations vice president Anna. "The thing that you're stressing about rarely actually comes to fruition. I do believe that. I'm like, 'Just wait it out. Something's going to give here. Everything bad will go away.'" Phillip, who has 14 years of agency experience, offered a similar sentiment:

> The worst possible scenario first of all was not something that was imminent, it was something that we were thinking had a potential to happen down the road. The first reality was that there wasn't someone pounding on our door trying to get in and saying, "You've screwed something up."

According to participants' accounts, the ability to put situations into perspective is developed through experience. "It seems like over time you start to sort of put things in perspective," said Rena, an advertising agency vice president. She elaborated:

> Yes, that was really bad, but you know what? Life goes on. They're going to forget about this. Things like that. Your entire world isn't ending because of our mistakes, it's how

> you react to the mistake and how you prevent the mistake from happening again.
>
> Anything that comes up tomorrow could be a bigger fire-drill.

Recovery, she said, comes with “being calm and thinking about the solution, knowing that it’s not the end of the world.”

Strategy 4: Faking it. Participants use the strategy of “faking” resilience for several different reasons. Some report it is important to maintain outward composure for the sake of their colleagues. For others, pride keeps them from letting a difficult client or colleague know they are struggling. Finally, for some, faking resilience *is* resilience. Each of these themes is described.

Phillip, who is a partner in a mid-sized agency, said faking resilience is important in his role as agency leader:

> I think it’s outward perception, but that’s really tough with the peers that surround you, right? Wow, he goes through hell and he is able to bounce back and I think no matter . . . There’s people that can put on a really great game face and never veer. I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve a little more, but at the same I realize that if . . . In this agency, if I’m crumbling, it doesn’t send a good message to the younger people around me that are looking up to me and saying, “That’s our leader,” and part of that is sometimes you have to just . . . Regardless of how you feel, internally have to say, “Doggone on it, we’re going to get through this,” and put a smile on your face and move along.

Anna believes her colleagues fake resilience. “We have some great fakers here, for sure,” she said. “No one wants to think that they can’t handle a situation.” As she discussed her belief that colleagues fake their resilience, it occurred to Anna that she did this, too. “Even now that I say that, maybe I fake it,” she said. “I don’t know. Maybe I’m just faking it to myself. I think no one wants to think they can’t handle it.”

Other participants were more sure that they deliberately fake resilience. For Will, an advertising agency partner with 14 years of marketing experience, faking resilience helps him maintain confidence and dignity in front of difficult clients. “I will put on the good face like I’m over it in a day,” he said. “Sometimes it goes on longer.” When asked why he thinks he wants to portray resilience, Will said, “in the case I am thinking of, I wasn’t going to give him [the client] the satisfaction of knowing that he had done something.”

Jane, a young public relations professional, reported that she learned the importance of faking resilience at work based on her experiences faking resilience in her personal life. “People would ask me how I did it, and I always say, “I faked it until I made it, and you should, too.”

Participants spoke to the fact that faking resilience outwardly is an important start in feeling resilient. Helen, an account director who has worked in the industry for 14 years, said:

> I think people who do this job have to fake recovery a lot. It’s hard to put your ideas, yourself out there time and time again. To me, that’s a big part of resilience, the faking it piece. Sometimes that’s the only way to recover. To just put on the brave exterior. Because, I think, something that can hold you back from bouncing back is the shame, the thought that others know this bad thing happened. If you put it out there that you’re okay, people think you are. And if other people think I’ve recovered, then I almost have.

Summary of Research Question 2. The second research question asked which specific communicative processes participants believe are involved in the process of resilience. Findings from this research question support the existing literature (Buzzanell, 2010) that suggests that maintaining and using communicative networks and putting alternative logics to work are important communicative strategies in the process of resilience.

A finding of this research is that whether it is done with colleagues or with friends, venting plays several important roles in the process of bouncing back. First, venting allows the individual to "get it out" and make sense of the incident or experience. Second, venting to others helps the individual feel that he or she is not alone—or not crazy. Third, venting helps the individual talk to life a plan or recovery course. In some cases, venting or commiserating fills all of these roles.

Participants also reported engaging in the strategy of putting alternate logics to work. When participants reported using this strategy, they typically were attempting to find a reason, beyond poor performance, that would cause a client to lash out. This often took the form of attempting to empathize with a client. Those who reported using this strategy had, in all cases, at least 10 years of work experience.

The outcomes from Research Question 2 (RQ2) contribute to the existing literature by suggesting two other processes or strategies that are at play in resilience: maintaining perspective and faking resilience. The strategy of maintaining perspective took several forms. First, some participants coped with difficult situations at work by maintaining a perspective about the nature of the work they do. Participants commented on the lack of a "life or death" scenario in their work. A second way interview participants claimed to maintain perspective was by attempting to not take feedback personally. Participants reported this is a learned behavior for some and gets easier over time. The third way participants report attempting to maintain perspective was by thinking through worst-case scenarios associated with the problem they were facing and comparing it to the actual situation at hand. Participants reported that when they did this, the actual situation usually did not seem as awful or unmanageable.

Participants reported using the strategy of faking resilience for several different reasons. Some participants reported that it is important to maintain outward composure for the sake of colleagues. For others, pride kept them from letting a difficult client or colleague know he or she was struggling. Finally, for some, faking resilience *was* resilience. Participants' responses related to faking resilience point to an unanswered question of whether "faked" resilience is a strategy to help one get to the point of resilience or if it is indeed resilience itself.

Research Question 3: How does successful recovery from a trigger event change how people report they enact resilience when faced with subsequent springboard or trigger events?

The third research question asked how successful recovery from a trigger event changed how people enact resilience when faced with subsequent trigger events. Answering this question is important because it helps to fill a gap in the existing literature on resilience. As previously stated, the existing literature lacks an emphasis on how the negative event or setback influences or activates resilience (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012).

Analysis of responses to this question uncovered four themes: (a) enacting resilience grows capacity for future resilience, (b) the tools used in the process of resilience change over time, (c) participants believe the ability to successfully activate resilience is critical to long-term career success, and (d) resilience is satisfying and reinforces itself. Each of these themes is discussed below.

Theme 1: Enacting resilience grows capacity for future resilience. Participants believed the activation of resilience after a setback strengthens the potential for coping positively with future setbacks. This theme was most evident when participants discussed an increasing ability to handle negative situations over the course of their careers.

Participants explained they now have confidence in their ability to handle difficult situations at work because they have the knowledge of previous successful recovery. "The things that just rocked me in my early days as an account manager don't faze me as much," said Helen, a public relations account director with 14 years of experience. "Things come up, like I'll get that scathing email from a client, and I'm like 'I can do this. I've done it.'" Alice, an account supervisor who has worked in both corporate and agency settings, explained:

> The things that I used to secretly cry over in the bathroom don't affect me like that anymore. I don't know if I've become tougher or if it's that I know I've gotten through worse. Now with some experience I can look back and see how each tough client prepared me for the next one.

Alice's observation that tough situations prepare her for the next difficult situation was a theme that other participants discussed. "When I look back I can see how bouncing back from the really tough things gave me confidence moving forward," said Helen. Anna, a public relations vice president, explained:

> I would say every single one [trigger event] makes me smarter. I truly believe that, because I look back at where I was . . . Every time you do that, I think, you just get better at it, in terms of being able to handle it mentally.

Theme 2: The tools used in the process of resilience change over time. Participants reported their processes of bouncing back after trigger events at work have changed as they are able to determine which tools are most effective for them. This was most evident in the role venting or commiserating played in the process of resilience. "I griped more at the beginning of my career than I feel like I do now," explained Finley, a seven-year agency veteran. "I don't know that I need it as much now or I don't have as many people that I want to confide in." Kelly, a senior account director, agreed that experience has changed her process of resilience.

> I've learned as I've gotten older that you probably shouldn't take it with you. Even like when [my boyfriend and I] were both working at same agency, and we brought so much of that home that it just caused us both to be unhappy.

Participants could not necessarily pinpoint why their strategies changed over time. In some cases the strategy, such as venting, ultimately became less fulfilling and less helpful in successful recovery. Participants also specifically discussed the fact that as they advanced in their career, they had fewer people with whom to vent. Additionally, participants such as Finley noted that they began to view venting as "unprofessional" as they advanced in their career. Still others, such as Anna, Frances, and Phillip, discussed a desire to model good behavior for their subordinates. Interestingly, those participants who discussed the strategy of maintaining perspective and showing empathy for their clients were also the participants who said they had outgrown the need to vent frequently.

Theme 3: Successful activation of resilience is critical to long-term career success. Participants who are managers believe the ability to successfully recover is so critical that they should not shield less experienced employees from the trigger events that would require activation of resilience. "You have to run through some walls," said Will, a partner in an advertising agency. "You've got to have had some bad client experiences. You've got to have clients yelling at you."

Will's quote illustrates a common theme among interview participants. Participants tended to agree that being able to bounce back is "critical," as Lori an account director said. Participants seemed to believe this ability was so important that they should not protect younger employees in tough situations. Phillip, who has 14 years of agency experience, explained why he has stopped shielding young team members from difficult situations at work:

> They have to go through it. You can't protect people from it. When we were just starting out, my inclination as maybe from being a father or just being a more experienced account director or account person was to protect them, to shield . . . "Don't worry, I'll handle that email." "You don't have to respond to that," or "I'll call the client back. You don't have to worry about it." The truth is . . .and I thought I was doing good and I was at that very moment, there was a sigh of relief, that was, "Ha, thank you, I didn't want to deal with this." "Yeah," and I feel, "Okay, I've made your life better and I'm just going to go deal with this because I'm better equipped to deal with it. Truth is, the only reason I became better equipped to deal with it is because I've dealt with it, and I don't think that they're ever too young.

The idea that account managers need to be able to bounce back in order to be successful is consistent with what seems to be underlying assumptions about the job itself, which is that the account manager should expect frequent criticism and that clients will act in an uncivil manner at times. It may be that because account managers share these assumptions they believe younger employees should experience a so-called trial by fire. Additionally, experienced managers who have observed their own increasing ability to bounce back from setbacks at work may want their younger employees to have these experiences so they are better prepared to handle difficult situations as their careers advance.

Theme 4: Resilience is satisfying and reinforces itself . participants' accounts reveal that successful recovery is satisfying. Participants feel pleased with themselves but also get positive feedback and even more respect for being able to take the tough criticism and stay calm and/or not fall apart. It's a badge of honor. And, they know if they can take that, they can take the next thing. "I think I started to get more respect when I was calm after a crisis like that versus being freaked out," Rena, a vice president of a large advertising agency, explained. "So when you get that positive reinforcement it sort of helps you change the way you behave." Frances offered a similar view:

> I try to look at it as an opportunity to show them how we can be even better, and oftentimes, the challenging situations with clients are the best opportunities to become an even more valuable part of their world because it's the way you handle the challenging situations that get you more credit and more goodwill from the client than even the handling of big wins.

Helen, who discussed being removed from her client's account at the client's request as a trigger event, recalled the moment she realized she had successfully recovered:

> The first day I was back at work after being removed from the account, I had to attend a meeting about the account with all the team members and the president of our agency to brainstorm ideas. I didn't know what to do. Obviously that's the last thing I wanted to do. I knew it was going to be torture, it was embarrassing. So right before the meeting I went into the bathroom to psych myself up to make sure I was not going to cry. Then I walked into the meeting like I had nothing to be embarrassed about, like nothing that had happened had hurt me. I didn't sit there and pout. I participated just like I would have any other day. The next day, our VP told me how she was so blown away at how professionally I handled everything and how she was so impressed. So then I started thinking about that situation less as something to be embarrassed about it more like—now you all know how professional, how mentally tough I am. And I really believe

> nothing that bad will happen to me again at work, and if it does, I don't think it will shake me like it did that time. Because that was awful but I ended up with more respect because of it. But it was truly, truly awful.

Summary of research question 3. The third research question asked how successful recovery from a trigger event changed how people enact resilience when faced with subsequent trigger events. Analysis of responses to this question uncovered four themes: (a) enacting resilience grows capacity for future resilience, (b) the tools used in the process of resilience changes over time, (c) participants believe the ability to successfully activate resilience is critical to long-term career success, and (d) resilience is satisfying and reinforces itself.

Summary of Results

Research Question 1 asked participants to describe the types of incidents and situations that required them to activate their own resilience. An analysis of their accounts showed their springboard or trigger events could be grouped into three categories: (a) negative performance feedback, (b) repeated "killing" of creative and/or strategic ideas, and (c) prolonged periods of stress due to volume of work and high expectations.

While participants tended to agree that accepting and bouncing back from negative performance feedback was an expected part of the job, they acknowledged that successful recovery was not always easy because the feedback may be emotionally charged and/or because the negative feedback may feel like a personal attack on the receiver.

Participants explained the rejection or killing of ideas could be a trigger event for resilience. Participants pointed to this as something they believe leads to the high turnover in marketing agencies. Participants also noted that the "maiming" of ideas can be as difficult—if not more difficult to cope with—than the outright rejection of ideas. Participants noted the emotional wear and tear they experienced when expected to repeatedly deliver creative and innovation ideas to clients who may change their minds or ultimately not have the budget to execute the ideas. Responses to this research question also point to the fact that account managers may feel an emotional attachment to their ideas equivalent to that of the professionals who work in the Creative department. Some of the professionals who participated in these interviews pointed out the irony in the fact as account managers they were expected to deliver feedback to Creatives in a sensitive way, but they did not believe others felt any need to be sensitive in the way they delivered feedback to the account manager.

The second research question asked which specific communicative processes participants called upon in the process of resilience. Findings from this research question support the existing literature (Buzzanell, 2010) that suggests that maintaining and using communicative networks and putting alternative logics to work are important communicative strategies in the process of resilience. When participants reported using the strategy of putting alternate logics to work, they typically were attempting to find a reason, beyond poor performance, that would cause a client to lash out. This often took the form of attempting to empathize with a client. Those who reported using this strategy had, in all cases, at least 10 years of work experience.

The outcomes from Research Question 2 (RQ2) contribute to the existing literature by suggesting two other processes or strategies that are at play in resilience: maintaining perspective and faking resilience. The strategy of maintaining perspective took several forms. First, some participants coped with difficult situations at work by maintaining a perspective about the nature of the work they do. Participants commented on the lack of a “life or death” scenario in their work. A second way interview participants claimed to maintain perspective was by attempting to not take feedback personally. Participants reported this is a learned behavior for some that becomes easier to achieve over time. The third way participants reported attempting to maintain perspective was by thinking through worst-case scenarios associated with the problem they were facing and comparing it to the actual situation at hand. Participants reported that when they did this, the actual situation usually did not seem as awful or unmanageable.

Participants reported using the strategy of faking resilience for several reasons. Some participants reported that it was important to maintain outward composure for the sake of colleagues. For others, pride kept them from letting a difficult client or colleague know he or she was struggling. Finally, for some, faking resilience *was* resilience. Participants' responses related to faking resilience point to an unanswered question of whether "faked" resilience is a strategy to help one get to the point of resilience or if it is indeed resilience itself.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) asked how successful recovery from a trigger event changed how people enact resilience when faced with subsequent trigger events. The themes generated by this research question make an important contribution to the literature on resilience. As previously stated, there is a lack of an emphasis in the existing literature on how the negative event or setback influences or activates resilience (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). Analysis of respondents' responses to this question uncovered four themes: (a) enacting resilience grows capacity for future resilience, (b) the tools used in the process of resilience change over time, (c) participants believe the ability to successfully activate resilience is critical to long-term career success, and (d) resilience is satisfying and reinforces itself.

The next chapter synthesizes the findings of the three research questions and makes a case for how this study contributes to the literature on resilience and agency theory. Additionally, practical implications for marketing communications practitioners and others in professional services are discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study used interviews with professionals who work in marketing communication agencies (*N*=22) to explore how people experience resilience when they encounter setbacks such as negative performance feedback from clients and colleagues on the job. While resilience is still not completely understood, it is believed to be an important capacity. Indeed, resilience is becoming a hot topic in the business press because of the recent realization that resilience may be just as important for professional success as some of the skills employers more commonly look for, such as education and experience (Coutu, 2002). Some may wonder, "What's the fuss? Why should we care about resilience in the workplace?" To date, research has shown that increased resilience is tied to better problem-solving skills, a more flexible response to threats, empathy, better interpersonal relationships, increased success, increased wealth, increased mental health, and increased mental health (Algoe & Frederickson, 2011; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Research has tied resilience to these positive outcomes, but to date, there is a lack of academic research dedicated to how the capacity for resilience can be developed (Luthans et al., 2006). The research presented in this dissertation was designed to add to the emerging body of literature on individual resilience in the workplace.

Chapter 4 provided examples of the types of situations that participants reported require them to bounce back or to activate their own resilience. While participants tended to agree that accepting and bouncing back from negative performance feedback is an expected part of the job, they acknowledged that successful recovery was not always easy because the feedback may have been emotionally charged and/or because it may have felt like a personal attack. Chapter 4 then discussed the specific communicative tools participants believed were involved in the process of resilience. Finally, Chapter 4 discussed how successful recovery from a trigger event changed how people reported enacting resilience when faced with subsequent trigger events.

This chapter provides both theoretical and practical implications of the results of the interviews presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of the theoretical contributions to the resilience literature. Next, this is a review of contributions to the advertising and professional services literature with a discussion of the normative nature of client incivility and a new application of the concept of client capture (Leicht & Fennel, 2001). Chapter 5 then moves to a discussion of the practical implications of this research, including a discussion of strategies professionals may use to increase their individual capacities for resilience. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of limitations of the research and opportunities for future research.

Theoretical Contributions to Resilience Literature

Resilience in the workplace is still a relatively unexplored phenomenon. Resilience began to be studied in the context of organizational research during the last decade (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). The existing literature suggests that individual resilience exists in the workplace, is tied to positive workplace outcomes, and is measureable. The current literature on resilience in the workplace focuses on resilience after major setback events such as a layoff or the cancellation of a project (e.g., Buzzanell, 2010; Coutu, 2002; Moenkemeyer et al., 2012; Seligman, 2011). Rather than focusing on major negative life events, the research presented in this manuscript concentrates on the "everyday" resilience that professionals in some fields need to enact in order to do their jobs day in and day out.

There are two noticeable gaps in resilience research in the work context that the present research attempts to fill: (a) resilience as a developable capacity, and (b) an understanding of how successful recovery from a trigger event influences future resilience. These ideas work together in a powerful way.

As has been discussed, much of the literature on resilience in the workplace treats resilience as a trait or resource rather than as a state and developable capacity (Moenkemeyer et al., 2012). To some, this creates a false dichotomy between resilient and non-resilient individuals. A static view of resilience ignores the process of resilience and focuses on the outcomes of resilience rather than on the antecedents of resilience. Through in-depth questioning of individuals who believe they have successfully tapped into their own capacity for resilience when they encountered trigger events at work, this research has uncovered some evidence that some of the strategies for enacting resilience and resilience itself are learned and developable. Consistently, participants identified two specific emergent strategies that seem to be learned behavior: maintaining perspective and faking resilience.

Maintaining perspective. As discussed in Chapter 4, the strategy of maintaining perspective takes a variety of forms including maintaining a perspective about the nature of the work they do ("it's PR, not ER," for example), not taking feedback personally, and comparing worst-case scenarios to the actual situation at hand. Participants reported that these strategies are learned behavior and get easier to execute with time and experience. Participants "grew" into these strategies as they gained experience. They also reported attempting to model these strategies for their less experienced colleagues. In this way, this research offers further qualitative evidence of resilience as a developable capacity rather than as a static trait.

Faking resilience. Participants reported using the strategy of faking resilience and the belief that their colleagues also fake resilience. An analysis of participants' accounts shows several important reasons practitioners may fake resilience. Some report faking resilience to maintain outward composure for the sake of colleagues. Others reported faking resilience in order to not outwardly communicate to a difficult client or colleague that they were struggling. Some participants reported faking recovery or bounce back because they believe that *is* resilience. From this view, it is possible that resilience may be in part socially constructed. This interesting idea of socially constructed resilience as true resilience is an area that could be explored in future research.

Luthans, Vogelgesang, and Lester (2006) called for more research into how people develop their own capacity for resilience as well as how they help develop the capacity in others. This research responds to that call by providing two specific strategies—maintaining perspective and faking resilience—that individuals can implement in order to grow their capacity for resilience. This contribution has practical contributions, as well, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Influence of Successful Recovery on Future Resilience

As has been discussed, the current literature lacks an emphasis on how the negative event or setback influences or activates resilience. Moenkemeyer, Hogel, and Weiss (2012) argue that existing research treats resilience "as a factor that influences a setback's impact on individuals (Richardson, 2002), thereby neglecting this setback's potential influence on resilience" (p. 631) and suggest more research in this area. The acknowledgement by participants of this research that enacting resilience helps grow capacity for future resilience is an important contribution to the communication literature on resilience. The assertion that enacting resilience grows capacity for future resilience evokes the work of Algoe and Frederickson (2011), who argue "each emotional experience lays down the tracks for the next and can trigger either downward or upward spirals" (p. 35).

In the context of this study, a marketing communication professional's activation of resilience in the face of a trigger event such as negative feedback will influence how well the professional is able to cope—that is, to be resilient—in the face of a negative situation in the future. Participants' use of personal accounts about trigger events emphasizes the importance of the event and how the trigger event itself influences an individual's capacity for accessing resilience in the future. Participants were clear in their reports that the ability to bounce back from a setback allowed them to enact resilience when faced with future trigger events. Several spoke of the satisfying nature of rebounding from an event. It seems participants found a level of confidence from their ability to bounce back that they believed was valuable in their careers. Repeatedly participants discussed the importance of "having the bad experiences" so they were better prepared to handle them—or rebound from them—in the future. Experience in dealing with difficult situations was said to be so important to the more experienced practitioners that they do not shield less experienced employees from painful experiences, such as dealing with a hostile client.

On the other hand, failed resilience after a trigger event may weaken an individual's ability to bounce back in the future. Participants remarked that some former colleagues ultimately could not take the environment. For example, Finley, an account supervisor, explained:

> If the ripple effects of a project going bad are severe, I think . . . I mean a lot of times you ultimately see people leave, go find another job, either because they feel like they can't restore their credibility internally [within the organization] or they don't want to . . . . They're just, that was their last straw. "I've done it. I'm done. I've given this everything. I've given it all I have. I'm done."

The Retrospective and Elusive Nature of Resilience

Another theme that emerged during analysis is the acknowledgement that resilience is retrospective. When participants were asked to describe a situation in which they needed to bounce back, they were all able to provide multiple examples. However, participants reported that they did not necessarily think of themselves as resilient when the situation occurred. Interestingly, some participants could not explain exactly how they activated their own resilience. They inherently knew they did, but often they could not describe how they did it. This supports previous assertions that "resilient people do not often describe themselves that way" (Coutu, 2002, p. 8).

Participants frequently mentioned they eventually "moved on" without being able to provide further details, underscoring that those who activate resilience often do not know how they did it. This response also underscores the important role in resilience of giving oneself time to recover from the event. Future research could investigate whether the "move on" mentality is truly resilience at work.

Theoretical Contributions to Agency and Professional Services Literature

This research contributes to our theoretical understanding of agency life. As discussed in Chapter 4, participants talked about trigger events, such as being communicated with in an uncivil manner, to be normative. Over and over again, participants described this type of behavior from clients as part of the job. In fact, being able to "take" this type of treatment from clients is practically part of the job description of an account manager at many agencies. After reviewing account after account of hostile, mean-spirited, and generally uncivil behavior in the workplace, the question had to be asked: Why is this behavior from clients accepted?

The normative nature of incivility. "I think it's unprofessional, but I also think it's expected or accepted," said Helen, an account director. "Some clients lash out. Some don't, of course. It's not every client. But it could be any client, you know?" Julia, who had worked at agencies for 18 years, said of clients who treat their agency counterparts poorly: "I think it's [lack of civility] a standard. They lash out at you. I would say that in all of my years of doing client service, there are very few clients that have not done that to me." Jane, who had one year of experience at the time of her interview, said: "Some clients are just mean. They don't filter anything before they tell you, either." Lori, among others, spoke to the fact that rude client conduct was not always yelling. She described her experience working with a client for more than five years:

> Every single project with him at the end you sort of felt like, okay I got this project done but I really don't feel that good about it. I don't think he was happy. I am definitely not happy. That the tone, for instance, he would use with you was just very condescending. It made you feel like, am I really this dumb of a person or is he just being a jerk?

The idea that clients delivered feedback in an offensive way was a common theme among participants. Angeline offered a similar account:

> One of our newer clients gives good feedback, but he's kind of an ass about it. It's like, "Maybe if you were a little bit nicer." I don't know. He's just very rude about it. There's a balance of being direct but also being polite. It makes no one wants to work with him because he's so rude in his emails.

Participants clearly had plenty of stories to share about clients who treated them poorly. Noticeably missing were examples of clients who apologized for poor behavior. This idea was probed during member checks. Participants said in their experience, clients do not apologize.

Will, a partner with a mid-sized agency, discussed a phone call in which a client yelled obscenities at him. “He never really apologized, like ‘Hey, I should not have blown up at you like that.’” Helen, an account director, said she does not remember clients apologizing. “I’ve never ever in 14 years had a client apologize for treating me poorly—and I’ve had clients who were so hard on me that I’ve cried in the bathroom,” Helen said. “I think clients don’t apologize because they don’t have to.” She explained that she has grown up in the industry accepting lack of civility from her clients:

> I remember early in my career talking to my manager about it and asking her if she could talk to the client’s manager. She told me that in her experience it rarely helped to tell the client not to talk to the agency that way. From there on, I guess I sort of expected that we just needed to take it. It’s part of the job.

Helen was not the only participant to basically accept the volatile nature of the relationship with some clients. Rachel, a 10-year agency veteran, explained her perspective on why the relationship between agencies and clients is the way it is:

> Advertising is just one of those weird industries, especially in PR [public relations], where your goal is to keep the client happy, and sometimes that means swallowing your pride and taking some shit . . . And it’s kind of humiliating, but when it comes to keeping a $10 million client that’s 40 percent of billing or whatever that number is, there’s just kind of an expectation that you kind of suck it up.

During a member check, Helen explained why she tolerates lack of civility from her clients:

> I accept it because that’s how it is. Why it’s that way? I don’t know. I guess it’s because the client is paying us. And, because they are paying us they expect to be able to yell at

> us if they want to. When I say it out loud, it sounds awful, doesn't it? They have the money so they have the power.

Client capture. Rachel's and Helen's comments represents a theme discussed by many participants: the economic chokehold clients have over their agencies. Participants acknowledged that by nature of the economic power clients have over their agencies, the agency professionals are expected to tolerate at least some level of incivility and even verbal abuse from their clients. Will, a managing partner in a mid-sized firm, noted the level of incivility he will tolerate is directly related to the amount the client is paying:

> At a certain point you feel like you're beating your head in the wall, like "Why am I even doing this?" It's because you are paying us X amount of money. Particularly in business relationships, the amount of shit you'll put up with is directly related to how much they're paying you.

As Dinovitzer, Gunz, and Gunz (2014) noted, "The relative power of professional and client has been a long-standing issue in the literature on the professions" (p. 3). The acceptance of otherwise intolerable behavior from a client may present a new application of the concept of "client capture" (Leicht & Fennell, 2001, p. 105). When they first introduced the concept of client capture Leicht and Fennell (2001) said:

> Some professional groups have faced a situation whereby the consumers (clients) or new ways of performing work (technologies) will undermine professional prerogatives and status. We refer to these trends under the heading of professions "captured" by clients or technologies. Under *client capture* the consumers of professional work gain the ability to control the activities, timing, and costs of professional work. In effect the "consumer

becomes sovereign" much as consumers search for (and price) other consumer goods and services. (pp. 105-106; emphasis in the original)

Corporate clients exert influence over a professional service firm, such as a marketing communications agency, because the agency "may be considerably more dependent on their clients than vice versa" (Dinovitzer et al., 2014, p. 3). Clearly the power dynamic between client and agency is driven in large part by money. Interview participants of this study acknowledged that the more profitable a client is, the more likely the agency was to tolerate incivility. The marketing communication professionals who participated in this research discussed this phenomenon indirectly. For example, Henry, a sole proprietor, discussed a situation in which he put up with a client he considered to be verbally abusive: "It was started to get really bad and I wanted to resign the account. I despised [the client] for about a year, but I kept doing the work because, as I said, the money was good."

Will described the phenomenon this way: "At least in our industry if somebody is paying us a million dollars a year they could do an awful lot. They could be really bad clients for a while." Will contrasts the level of abuse he will take from a client with a small budget. He stated, "If a $5,000 client or project comes in and somebody treats us like shit, we're like, 'No chance.'"

Client capture applies to the amount of incivility an agency professional will take from a high-paying client. It may also provide a theoretical frame for understanding why an agency professional will bend to a difficult client's demands even when the agency professional strongly disagrees. In their foundational work on the topic, Leicht and Fennell (2001) used the term client capture to describe a propensity for a professional to be "captured" by a client and render advice that has less to do with professional standards but which is more closely related to the commercial and economic interest of the client and the professional.

In a marketing communications agency, client capture could manifest itself as the agency not challenging the client when the agency believes the client is wrong, not fighting for the best creative idea, or becoming order-takers rather than advisors. In each of these scenarios, the agency professional (or the agency as an entity) is putting his or her own professional expertise aside in deference to the client who holds the power based on the economic structure. Of her experience with particularly difficult clients, Helen said, "Sometimes I get to a point where it's 'whatever you want it to be, it will be that.'" Anna, a vice president of a small public relations firm, said:

> You just start to give in, and can't be excited about the work . . .It's almost like at that point you've given up. They always say that if you quit fighting, and you quit being mad, that's the worst sign, because it's just apathy.

The concept of client capture has been explored in the business law, accounting, and management consultant literature. A search of the advertising agency and marketing communication literature does not reveal investigations applying the concept. Thus, this research offers a new application of the concept of client capture. Further, examining client capture from the perspective of marketing communication agency professionals is an opportunity for future research.

Practical Implications

This research has important implications for marketing communication practitioners. The following paragraphs discuss how practitioners may use this research to develop the capacity for resilience in themselves and their team members and how they may mitigate emotional and psychological damage to themselves and their team members. The suggestions may even help to stem account management turnover. Finally, the chapter closes with a suggestion for those account managers who eventually become the client.

First, it should be noted that scholars and other thought leaders increasingly believe employee happiness at work is important (e.g., Achor, 2015; Aaker, Leslie, & Schifrin, 2012; McKee, 2014). While this research does not offer a direct connection between resilience at work and happiness at work, other research has connected resilience to other positive states such as optimism and hope (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Additionally, it could be argued there is a relationship between unhappiness and lack of successful recovery from adverse events. Writing on his website, corporate trainer and former Harvard professor Shawn Achor suggests that "Happiness fuels success, not the other way around. When we are positive, our brains become more engaged, creative, motivated, energetic, resilient, and productive at work" (2015, n.p.)

Managers who do not care about employee happiness for humanitarian reasons may care about the bottom-line benefits of happy employees, such as innovation, increased productivity, and fewer sick days (Aaker et al., 2012). Leaders of marketing agencies may be particularly interested in employee happiness because some research has shown that employees are more likely to come up with creative ideas when they are in a better mood than normal (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Creative and innovative ideas are the lifeblood of marketing agencies.

I argue that agencies do not have to lose as many employees as they do. In the United States, the average marketing communication industry experiences an annual turnover rate of approximately 30 percent (Ad Age, 2013; Stratz, 2012). The cost of employee turnover in the United States is well documented, with some estimates suggesting it costs firms as much as 150 percent of an employee's total compensation to replace him or her (Hillmer, Hillmer & McRoberts, 2004; Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991). The average salary of a professional working in an account service job at an advertising agency is $65,000 a year (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014a). This means, on the high end, replacing a single employee could cost a firm $97,000. An agency with 50 employees that loses 15 employees per year could expect to spend more than $1 million replacing these employees. Turnover also diminishes an agency's ability to generate revenue due to lost billings when the agency does not have an employee to fill potential billable hours. Sydney Hunsdale, an industry consultant, said: "[Staff] turnover is the biggest financial drain on our business. We don't perform to the level we should because people are going out of the door. We steal from each other and have to pay more each time we do so" (Tylee, 2014, n.p.).

In addition to being expensive, agency turnover is considered undesirable by clients and may ultimately lead to the agency being fired by the client. High agency turnover has been noted as a major client complaint since at least as far back as 1982 (Hotz, Ryans, & Shanklin, 1982). In a 2014 survey of Chief Marketing Officers and other high-level marketing decision makers, more than half of those surveyed reported that high turnover is still a problem (Dan, 2014). Turnover of staff weakens a client's ties to the agency because professionals that the client comes to like, trust, and respect may no longer be at the firm. "The lack of consistent relationships makes it easier for a client to take their business down the street" (Goforth Gregory, 2012, n.p.).

A common reason for turnover of employees of marketing communications agency is a toxic or otherwise undesirable client. According to research done by marketing industry consultants Agency Firebox, "bad clients" is the second most frequently cited reason for employee turnover at agencies (Sakas, 2014). Agency disorganization, limited advancement, and poor employee accountability rounded out that list.

Managers and leaders of agencies can work to decrease the turnover of their agencies by implementing at least three strategies. First, managers could provide training to their employees, particularly those who are assigned to work on difficult accounts, on how to deal with difficult feedback, how to work with difficult people, and how to tap into their own sources of resilience. Managers can do this both by providing specific strategies (such as using social networks, maintaining perspective, and faking resilience) as well as modeling resilience strategies. The common adage that "people join companies, but leave managers," when applied to agency settings may be most relevant when managers do not offer employees who work with difficult employees enough social support. Coaching employees on how to bounce back may help employees recover and decrease their desire to leave their job. This research provides examples of resilience tools and tactics that have been used successfully by individuals in high-stress work environments. The results of this research provide direction for individuals wishing to grow their own capacity for resilience and for managers wishing to develop capacity for resilience among their team members.

Participants of this study spoke of having negative client experiences as an important part of the career trajectory. It could be those managers who believe they are protecting their employees from the harsh challenges of dealing with difficult clients may actually being doing them a disservice in the long run. This research does not necessarily advocate that inexperienced employees deliberately and unnecessarily be subjected to harsh treatment. However, if being able to tolerate this type of behavior from clients is truly a requirement for long-term job success, managers should carefully consider how and when they expose their employees to these situations and how they support the employees moving forward. Managers may also want to share their own negative and upsetting experiences with their subordinates. Participants of this research offered different perspectives on this tactic. Anna and Rena, both a vice presidents, suggested it was helpful to share stories with subordinates. On the other hand, Frances, also an agency vice president, said she was uncomfortable sharing the experiences that unnerved her with her team because she does not like her subordinates to see her insecurities and weaknesses.

Managers can work with clients on how to deliver feedback and manage conflict with their agency partners. This could be done through formal or informal sessions with clients. This would likely require an investment of time and money from the agency. However, the investment likely pales in comparison to the time and money lost due to turnover.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the responsibility of current agency professionals who will eventually become clients. Despite exhaustive research, I did not find literature or industry statistics on the number of agency professionals who leave agency life to become the client in a corporate marketing setting. My own experience tells me this is a frequent occurrence. Some professionals are treated poorly while at the agency and then treat their agency poorly when they become the client. During interviews I asked some participants if they believed former agency professionals made better or worse clients. Participants did not decisively conclude on this matter. “I’d like to say they are better,” said Phillip, an agency partner. “But sometimes they are worse.” Rachel, an account supervisor, said, “Some are better because they understand how to work with us. There are some who are worse because now that they are the client they want to push around the agency.” This negative cycle may be a cultural phenomenon based on modeled behavior. Research shows that clients do not like to see high agency turnover (Dan, 2014). Research also shows that a major reason agency employees leave is become of poor clients (Sakas, 2014). Clients should take some responsibility for their treatment of agency personnel. Further, they should remain cognizant of the possible negative business effects of client capture, in which their treatment of the agency ultimately results in less effective marketing.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The claims made in this research are bound by the fact that they represent the views of a relatively small number of professionals. However, the goal of this research was recognizability rather than statistical significance. It is possible that future research could explore this concept of resilience with a larger group of professionals in an attempt to yield additional insights. Moreover, the context of marketing communication firms is unique to those with this experience and does not apply to all working professionals. However, I believe the phenomenon of resilience in the face of criticism would be recognizable to professionals who work in various facets of intellectual services.

It should also be noted that the people who participated in interviews were working for agencies at the time of the interview. The fact that they are still working in this notably tough environment is relevant. To better understand resilience in this context, it could be useful to interview professionals who have left agency life to discover the extent to which a lack of resilience influenced their decision to leave. While much of the communication literature focuses on how and when resilience is activated, it could be quite useful to better understand failed resilience. Turnover is a known problem in the marketing agency industry, and some of this turnover is related to toxic clients. Therefore, understanding how and when individuals' resilience fails them when dealing with toxic clients may help managers and individuals determine proactive strategies they could employ to prevent failed resilience.

I acknowledge that my own experience in this industry has undoubtedly influenced the outcome of this project. While I believe my experience was an asset to this research, there are some possible limitations associated with my experience. I took care to separate my own feelings and experiences as an agency professional and as a client through memoing, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, my perspectives likely influenced my analysis. I had previously worked with some of the interview participants. Others would have known of my experience in marketing. I believe my shared experience with participants allowed a level of trust that was important to answering the research questions. However, there is the possibility that it may have resulted in a social desirability bias on the part of interviewees, since participants might be influenced to present themselves in a certain manner when speaking to a person they know to be a researcher with marketing experience.

An interesting opportunity for future research is to combine a resilience measure (such as the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale, 2003) with interview data. The potential benefit is the comparison of individual resilience capacity with individuals' accounts of their successful and unsuccessful recovery or bounce back. It would be interesting to understand if and how a high score on the Connor Davidson scale corresponded with individual's own accounts of their resilience and the strategies used. An additional opportunity for future research is to explore the concept of resilience from a group or team perspective. The majority of account managers work on teams with other AM, creatives, media buyers, and project managers. It could be fascinating and insightful to interview people who work together on teams that experience strong adversity from clients to understand individual and group coping strategies.

Finally, an opportunity for future research is to explore the idea of faked resilience as resilience. Participants of this research stated they use this strategy and believe others do, too. Future research could investigate whether there is a difference between fake resilience and true resilience or whether this is a distinction without a difference.

Conclusion

This study explored the concept of resilience using interviews with professionals who work in marketing communication agencies (N=22). These interviews yielded in-depth accounts of the types of situations that serve as trigger or springboard events for individual resilience. Despite the fact that researchers now believe resilience is important for job success and at least in part something that can be developed, very little research has been dedicated to how individuals can develop their own capacities for resilience and how people, such as managers, could help develop the capacity in others (Luthans et al., 2006). This research was designed to add to the emerging body of literature on individual resilience in the workplace. Findings demonstrate there are general strategies used by professionals with experience to bounce back from setbacks at work. This research makes theoretical contributions to the developing body of resilience literature by exploring the communicative tools and strategies used by those who report to be able to successfully tap into their own resilience and by providing qualitative evidence that resilience is a developable capacity. This research adds to the agency literature by exploring the normative nature of client incivility and how it may contribute to the industry's high turnover and by offering a new application of the concept of client capture. This research also adds to the agency literature by presenting the voice of the account manager, which is notably absent in much of the recent agency literature.

The practical implications of this research are tremendously important to me. In particular, this research offers specific strategies that can be enacted by individuals and modeled by managers to help bounce back from adversity and develop the capacity for resilience. My overarching goal for my research is to contribute to the growing body of literature dedicated to making the American workplace a more positive place. I hope this research can be used to work toward that goal.

End Notes

1 The term Account Manager (or AM) is used throughout to refer to professionals who work in the Client Services, Account Management or Account Service department of marketing communications agencies regardless of the specific title of the individual. I made this choice for consistency and clarity because these terms are used interchangeably in the marketing industry.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

If participant has not already signed the Informed Consent form, I will start by reading the consent form and asking for oral consent.

1. Tell me about your job … What are your primary responsibilities?
2. Could you tell me a little about the kinds of clients you work with? What type of expectations do they have of the agency and of you in particular?
3. Can you think of a time when you received feedback you did not agree with?

   Follow-ups to include any or all of the following:

   a. Who was it from?
   b. How did you respond?
   c. What was that like for you?
   d. What did you do to address or correct the issue?
   e. How do you know when to push back on the client? Or are they always right?
4. Tell me about a time you received feedback that was difficult for you to hear.

   Follow-ups to include any or all of the following:

   a. What did you do next?
   b. What did you do after that?
   c. What was that like for you?
5. Could you tell me about a time you recovered from a difficult situation at work?

   Follow-ups to include any or all of the following:

   a. What did you do next?
   b. What did you do after that?

   c. How did that influence how you handled similar situations after that?

6. Did that situation help you cope in the future? If so, how/why?
7. For many of us, there are times when we really struggle to bounce back or recover after receiving difficult feedback or performing poorly. Can you think of a time in which you struggled to bounce back or even could not bounce back?

   Follow-up to include any or all of the following:

   a. What was that like?
   b. How did going through that situation help you in the future? Or did it?
8. Do you remember a time when you saw someone else successfully recover after a difficult interaction with a client or colleague? What did that look like?

   Possible probe: Do you think people ever fake bouncing back from a tough situation? Why would they do that?

   a. Follow-up: What effect, if any, does that have on them going forward?
9. Are there any tips or tricks to recovering from or coping during a setback or difficult situation?
10. Can you think of anything you've seen a client or colleague do when giving feedback that you think helped the receiver recover or cope?
    a. Follow-up: Is there anything you think does not work to help the other person recover?
11. For those with more than 5 years of agency experience: Agencies have a notoriously high turnover rate. How have you been able to stay in the agency environment?
12. For those with less than 5 years of experience: Do you see yourself working in an agency setting for a long time?

a. If yes: Ask them to define “long time.”

b. If yes: What do you think you’ll need to continue working here or at another agency?

c. If no: Why not? What would you do instead?

For those who are managers/have direct reports:

13. How have your experiences coping with difficult feedback changed how you provide feedback?

14. How do you help people on your team deal with negative feedback and/or missing client expectations?

Demographic information to be collected at the end:

1. How long have you worked at this job?
2. How long have you worked in the industry?
3. Have you ever worked on the client side?
4. How many clients do you currently service?
5. Do you have any direct reports? If so, how many?
6. Male/Female

15. Is there anything else you’d like to say about dealing with negative feedback or with resilience?

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Email

NAME,

I am currently working on my dissertation on how marketing communication professionals exhibit resilience in the course of their work. As part of my research I am interviewing professionals who work at marketing communication agencies about their experiences receiving and dealing with negative feedback from clients and colleagues.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview with me? The interview should last no more than one hour and will be scheduled at your convenience. If possible, I would like to interview you in person, but we can conduct the interview over the phone if that is more convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Tracy Blasdel
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Kansas

Appendix C

Informed Consent Statement

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore how resilience is activated and leveraged by marketing communication practitioners when they receive negative feedback from clients and colleagues.

PROCEDURES

Interviews will be conducted in person or by phone and will be taped (with the participant's consent). The interview should take no more than 60 minutes.

BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to individual participants, other than the knowledge that you have contributed to the understanding of resilience in the context of marketing communication agencies. The researcher will share the result of these learnings with you, if desired.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. The interviews will be professionally transcribed by a paid transcription service. Pseudonyms will be used in place of actual names.

All participant material and information pertaining to this study will be kept securely in a locked location by the researcher. Upon the project's conclusion, all participant information will be destroyed. The researcher will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

AUDIO RECORDING

All interviews will be audio recorded. Consent to be audio recorded is required for participation in this research project. However, participants may cancel the recording at any time. Only the researcher and a professional transcription service will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be stored securely in the researcher's locked office. Recordings will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Tracy Blasdel, The University of Kansas, Communication Studies, Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 102, Lawrence, KS 66045. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Participant's Name | Date

Participant's Signature | Date

Researcher Contact Information

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